

LOVE IS
OF THE VALLEY
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DAVID LYALL



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LOVE IS OF THE VALLEY

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THE LIGHTS OF HOME
THE ONE WHO CAME AFTER
SHIPS OF MY DESIRE
SIGN OF THE GOLDEN FLEECE
THE HOUSE NOT MADE WITH
HANDS

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LOVE IS OF THE VALLEY

AN OLD-FASHIONED STORY

BY

DAVID LYALL

HODDER AND STOUGHTON LTD

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ST. PAUL'S HOUSE WARWICK SQUARE E.C.4

“ Come down, O maid, from yonder mountain height :
For Love is of the valley, come thou down
And find him ; by the happy threshold, he,
So waste not thou ; but come, for all the vales
Await thee ; azure pillars of the hearth
Arise to thee ; the children call ! ”

Tennyson.

CHAPTER I

IT was quite a common story, such as one could read in the newspapers almost any day. Much of the suffering of the world, some of it irretrievable, arises out of common occurrences. There are certain qualities in the human race which, fine in themselves, need control and discipline, or they head for disaster. They provide a keen, sometimes an irresistible, temptation to the unscrupulous to trade on them.

Take, for instance, an inordinate ambition, a keen selfishness on the one hand, and a careless drifting, a beautiful but quite unpractical trust which almost amounts to shirking of responsibility on the other, and you are provided with the elements of a world tragedy.

These elements do not fuse, but they can be played off against one another, and they often are, by the unscrupulous.

The young make light of these great factors in human life; the old, standing by, watch the gradual unfolding of the film, often with dismay. Counsel or reproof do not avail, or but seldom, the human soul has to work out its own destiny, often in a great silence.

Beatrice Heron was not thinking of any such vital issues as she busied over a homely task in the attic room of one of those little old-fashioned, delectable houses which, though they may be overridden by the new kind, replete with every convenience, will never be ousted from the affections of those who are so fortunate as to possess and appreciate them.

This little house, appropriately called "The Outlook," because it was perched on rising ground at a queer angle, and from its front windows commanded a magnificent prospect of sea and sky. It looked straight out on the

waters of the Firth of Forth, and the fringes of the opposite shore, alternating between gold and grey, according to the sun's mood.

To-day it was grey, very grey, the mists had swooped down on the sea, and a thin, fine rain was battering against the panes. A chilly, inhospitable day, which made indoors pleasant, and suggested the doing of all little odd jobs with which the fine weather interferes.

Miss Heron was concerned with the possibilities of a shabby coat and skirt which she loved, because it had been bought, a sale bargain, at a very good shop, one of the small individual shops which the Herons could no longer afford to patronise.

The possessor of that shop, who had served the family in their palmier days, had a warm heart to them, partly because, as she frequently said, Miss Heron set off her clothes, and partly because she had been the recipient of many kindnesses from them, particularly in holiday times.

Many a good week-end she had spent at Linnorie, that delectable old family house, hidden snugly in a lap of the Pentlands, which had now passed from the Herons for ever.

A small oil stove, which the greatest care could not prevent smelling a little, partially warmed the little eyrie which Beatrice had claimed as her own when they came first to "The Outlook." It had a sloping roof and a big storm-window, guaranteed to admit every wind that blew. But it was a glorious place even in storm, because you could stand there and imagine you were out on some rocky headland, surrounded by naught but sea and sky.

No roof intervened between the eyrie and the sea, it was too high for that. The furniture was odd and shabby. A worn but still valuable Persian rug covered the greater part of the rough boards, an old-fashioned round table with drawers and a beautiful base stood in the middle. It had been the hall table at Linnorie, and had been passionately clung to by Beatrice when the family crash necessitated their removal. That was six years ago, when Beatrice was eighteen. She was now twenty-four. She looked her age, and her elegant figure had the dignity as well as the grace of an older woman. She possessed

that indefinable something which, for lack of a better name, we call breeding. She was of the race-horse type, tall and slight, and straight as a reed, moving and investing the smallest movement with a spontaneous grace.

Her head was proudly poised on her slender shoulders, her neck white and finely moulded, her face, if a trifle sallow, regularly featured. Her eyes were dark, and her hair a warm chestnut, an unusual combination. She was beautiful without knowing it. Some had tried to tell her so, but had been discouraged by her remoteness, something distant and unattainable. She had not yet met that passionate love in a man which is not discouraged by remoteness, beholding in it merely an obstacle to be demolished by his tempestuous or persistent wooing, and the counterfeit, the trembling, inarticulate brand of wooing, had not appealed to her. Strong and fine herself, her mate must be cast by the artificer in the same mould.

On the round table was spread the well-cut coat, and Beatrice in front of it, knitting her brows. The shape was decidedly out of date, and the material shabby and worn all over, and she had to decide whether the work entailed would give any adequate or satisfactory result.

She was one who weighed up happenings and consequences. She seldom acted on impulse. This undoubtedly gave a certain decisiveness, a slight hardness, which in a less physically attractive woman might have repelled.

A low knock at the door disturbed her, and in answer to her call the small, meagre, rather untidy domestic help entered.

No faithful and efficient retainer had followed the Herons into their semi-obscurity, and "The Outlook" had groaned and travailed for years under a succession of badly-equipped and nearly always restive, discontented helpers. Mrs. Heron was largely to blame for that.

She could not leave them alone. She was one of those who are convinced that the only way to secure value for money in domestic service is to establish a complete system of espionage punctuated by distrust and discouragement. That the system fails every time does not

seem to open their eyes to the fact that it has no elements of success in it. Even the most limited intelligence can grasp a hostile, discouraging atmosphere, and does not thrive in it.

Not the least part of Beatrice Heron's fight with fate was trying to counteract her stepmother's evil influence over their domestic helps. They could only afford to keep one, and she was constantly being changed. "If you was the mistress, miss," more than one had said, "I'd stop, but I juist canna be doin' wi' the mistress—she's never aff your track."

Beatrice turned quickly when the intruding damsel appeared, fully expecting to hear some complaint regarding the failure of a tradesman to deliver some commodity needed for immediate use. This was an everyday occurrence, and "The Outlook" was a long way from any shop, on the outside edge of the tradesmen's round, and the orders were not generous enough or of sufficient importance to impart eagerness and punctuality to their service.

"What is it, Lizzie?" she asked, and her voice had a singularly pleasant quality, which somehow had the power to soothe ragged edges either of nerves or temper. A soothing voice is a gift of God, for which gratitude should be felt and shown. There are so many of the other sort in the world, raucous, irritating voices, which, like a rasping hinge, prevent the machinery of life from working smoothly.

"It's a note, miss. It's got 'urgent' marked on it. The laddie said it was to be delivered immediate."

"Is he waiting for an answer, Lizzie?" she asked as she took the partly soiled envelope from the girl's hand, surprised to observe her father's handwriting on it.

"No, miss, he said there was no answer, but I was to gie it to nobody but yoursel'."

"Thank you, Lizzie," she said, and the girl withdrew at once, though she had not been bidden to do so. Beatrice then broke the seal. Inside was a half sheet of office paper bearing the address of her father's office in York Place.

Across it was written, in a sprawling hand which indicated extreme nervousness on the part of the writer :

" Dear Beatrice,—Come up to the office at once. Say nothing to anybody, particularly to Lotta. Just come."

It was signed with her father's initials, that was all. She put it in her pocket, a queer expression flitting across her face. That more trouble was indicated went without saying. To her father she was the first port in any and every storm, and his warning to say nothing to her step-mother was significant.

She walked over to the window, and observed with a certain relief that the rain was still pouring from leaden skies, and that the blinding mists hung low over the sea, obscuring it and the fringes of the shores beyond. It was better so. She could merely slip a mackintosh coat over her morning dress which, though neat, would not have stood the test of a bright sunny morning. She put out the oil stove, spread a clean dust sheet over her dress-making operations, and quietly left the room.

Her sleeping chamber was the adjoining attic. There were three on the top floor, the workroom, her bedroom, and the maid's room. Lotta thought it a strange taste which made Beatrice willing to climb two stairs to an attic room, and consort on the top floor with " the girl," as she called her. She did not sense the relief it was to put as much available space as the little house afforded between her and the commerce of family life. She quietly laced on her boots, folded a little woollen crossover on her breast, and slipped into her coat. It was a " Burberry," of old fashion and shape, but looking what it was to the last. A small stitched hat of the same material, with a bunch of eagle plumes at the side, a pair of wash-leather gloves, and she was ready for the road. She slipped down the stairs quietly and went to the kitchen.

" Do you know where Miss Ida is, Lizzie ? "

" No, miss, but she's out, that's a' I ken. I've just ta'en the mistress in her cocoa, would you like a cup ? "

Beatrice shook her head, and thanked the girl for her thoughtfulness.

"Just carry on as best you can for lunch, and if I'm not back ask Mrs. Heron not to wait."

"And when she asks where you've gaen, Miss Beatrice, what will I say?"

"Say you don't know, and that I'll be back as soon as I can," said Beatrice quite clearly. She stepped out into the kitchen passage and went out by the basement door. It was a queer, low half-basement, opening at the back on to a quite pretty little garden. It ensured more privacy upstairs than is usually found in a house of that dimension, but a basement always complicates the housewife's life, and it had been often the excuse for the disappearance, sometimes without warning, of the casual help bound by no tie of affection or duty to the house.

Beatrice was glad to be out of doors, and loved the rain. She would have liked to remove her hat, and let it patter on her hair and bathe her face. All outdoor things and life Beatrice Heron loved. Nature had intended her to walk in wide spaces, far from feverous towns, to be in tune with nature in the wild; body and spirit alike were often cramped and harrowed by the narrowness of her life.

So far it had offered little chance of escape. Gentleness and the traditions of race, to which Walter Heron still clung with a queer, weak persistence, forbade a young woman of her standing from plunging into the commercial arena. It was before the war deluge this brief, poignant story happened, and Beatrice moved in an area where old prejudices die hard. She was in inward revolt against them, yet did not know how to break away. Fate, big with tragedy, was now knocking at her door, opening it indeed upon a strange new chapter of experience.

She had some little distance to walk before she could attach herself either to a train or a tram car. The last means of transit offered first, and though the thin, fine rain was still falling, she climbed to the top, ensconced herself near the front, pulled the shabby old glazed cover round her, and put up her umbrella. She was the only unit on the top of the car, but that did not disquiet her,

rather it pleased her present mood, which was quick with anxiety. Something unusual must have occurred to make her father send a note by hand all the way to Trinity. She almost wished he had indicated the nature of the trouble, but as he had written the note, presumably nothing had happened to him. Of late he had aged in looks; once or twice she had caught herself regarding him with an inward qualm. She felt no special thrill that he should have sent for her in whatever crisis had arisen. That was of frequent occurrence. None knew better than Beatrice herself what was her calling and election in her father's house. She was at once the scapegoat and the standby, one to be appealed to when things went wrong, and blamed always.

It had developed her resourcefulness, and she often found herself watching her own development with a kind of quiet inward amusement. The sport of circumstances she was in the meantime, yet never, somehow, had lost supreme faith in her own destiny. She believed, feeling it in her own soul, of which she was captain, that she was made for better things than the petty fight with circumstance, the daily fret over the trivial round, the common task. But just of late, she had had to confess to a new and rather insistent kind of weariness and distaste.

So she felt, as she speculated on what could have happened at the office, distinctly conscious of anticipation that had something pleasurable about it.

She had to leave the car at a certain turning and pursue the last lap of her little journey on foot. Edinburgh streets on the north side are very grey and slightly forbidding on a typical wet day in early spring, when the wind is from the east, and there is a nip in the air.

There is nothing kindly or encouraging about them, they seem rather to forbid nearer approach. But Beatrice loved Edinburgh, just as she loved the "winds austere and pure" of which Stevenson sang so passionately in his exile from the city of his love.

After a brief walk she paused at a wide, shallow flight of steps leading to a door which was flanked by several brass plates.

A fairly large one on the right bore the inscription

"Maitland, Heron, and Brodie, W.S." They had two rooms and an outer office on the ground floor, and two above, spacious, expensive premises, but sometimes it is politic to spend what looks like an undue amount on the right kind of address. The firm had been there for three generations, there was now no representative of the Maitland family in it, and Brodie had only been in the firm for eleven years.

Walter Heron was the "W.S.," and conferred the right kind of distinction on the firm. But his best days were long over, and of late he had become a mere henchman to Brodie, who was one of the strong, unscrupulous men who sometimes achieve disaster which involves a great many innocent persons.

Beatrice had been very young when Brodie became a partner. Her mother had been alive then, and it had marked the beginning of her health's decline.

The family misfortunes seemed to date from that. Bit by bit Brodie absorbed all the rights and privileges, and in the long run had even secured that coveted home and estate of Linnorie for himself. It would not serve the development of this story to describe the methods by which the transfer was gradually accomplished. It was the triumph of the strong and unscrupulous over the weak and the finer fibre. And now the culminating disaster had been accomplished which presumably would wipe the name and standing of the old firm from the consideration and esteem of all decent people.

Beatrice entered the little inquiry and waiting-room, a drab place, with a bare floor and brown wire blinds fitted to the windows, across which the firm's names in dull gold letters showed to the street.

A young clerk, staring idly out, turned to receive her inquiry.

"Mr. Heron in his room, and alone?" she asked, with a slightly imperious note in her voice. Somehow the slack young clerk, the air of desolation about the place, seemed to strike a sinister note.

"Yes, miss," the lad answered, and was lifting the flap for the purpose of ushering her upstairs, when she said decisively:

" You needn't trouble to come up. I am Miss Heron, I can find my way." She ran up the shallow stone staircase quickly and opened the door. Her father was pacing the floor, a thin, grey-haired old man, with a high-bred, sensitive face, and sad eyes which brightened at sight of the dear, familiar face.

" Ah, there you are, my dear, thank God ! "

" I came off at once, father, of course, but what is it ? Nothing has happened to you, anyhow."

" No, no, not to me, only to Brodie—he shot himself at Linnorie this morning."

CHAPTER II

BEATRICE did not lose her head. The first essential was to restore her father's composure, evidently broken by the tragedy.

He was shaking all over, his very lips were white.

She put her hand through his arm, as if seeking to steady him with her young strength.

"How terrible! Perhaps if you can tell me about it, father, it will be easier. Who brought the news?"

"Nobody, they telephoned through. It was a servant, I think—I was so upset I could not reply to her."

"I understand—then you have no particulars, but there must have been a motive."

"Oh, yes, undoubtedly there was a motive."

"A very strong one, surely," pursued Beatrice reflectively. "I haven't seen Mr. Brodie for a long time, but he did not strike me as a man who would act on a sudden frenzy."

"He would not, no man less likely to act in that way. It is a most frightful disaster, in which I am afraid I am involved. It had to do with trust funds."

Beatrice paled at that. Poverty and anxiety are endurable where there is no taint of dishonour.

"Oh father, don't say that, at least if there was any defalcation you would have no share in it."

"No, no, certainly not, no personal share, but the firm would be blamed."

Beatrice pondered for a moment, torn betwixt two strong elements of feeling. She had no love for the Brodies, whom in her secret heart she had often charged with having undermined both her father's position and his will. It was the last named which Beatrice, with a kind of merciless clearness of vision the young use some-

times as a substitute for experience, regarded as the greater injury.

Walter Heron could never by himself have built up nor carried on a business in the commercial sense ; he lacked the necessary qualities, but in his younger years, before this strange blight had overtaken his powers, he had added distinction to one already established by his winning personality, his power to attract sympathy and confidence. Brodie, a very different kind of man, grosser in every sense, had not scrupled to use his partner's power to the uttermost for the bolstering of certain ambitious financial schemes of his own. But like most ambitious people, he had overreached himself at the last, and being faced by an *impasse* from which there was no escape, excepting through the long grip of the profession he had dishonoured, he had taken the coward's line of least resistance, and left his family and a helpless old man to face the music. Beatrice, without particulars, saw the whole nefarious business as clearly as if the noonday sun shone on it.

"Trust funds!" she repeated, as she drew him to a chair, and set him down. "Try and tell me about it, dear."

"It had to do with mining concessions in South Africa, in Mexico, and other places. Brodie was convinced it was a sound scheme and that we should make a fortune. He often talked about it."

"Yes, but tell me exactly how he operated ; that sort of business was surely entirely outside your profession. I always thought it belonged to the Stock Exchange."

"All sorts of people dabble in it, my dear," said Heron with a slight melancholy smile. "Brodie sold out certain trust funds we had in charge for clients to pay up the concession demands, always hoping he would be able to restore them, plus a handsome interest. I believe he was honest in this belief. He is dead, Beatrice, and the whole world will sling mud at his memory and name. At least let us be no less than just." A tear, sprung from she knew not where, dimmed for a moment Beatrice Heron's bright eye. She had never loved nor revered her father more than at that moment, when supreme disaster

having overtaken him, he could take time to be just to the man who had placed him in a truly awful position. Suddenly unknown fears took possession of the girl, as she stood straight in front of him, her waterproof thrown back, as if she felt the heat of the well-warmed room, thus revealing the straight, slim lines of her figure. Her head was slightly thrown back, there was determination and poise to cope with the fear to which she must give voice.

"Father, the thing you have told me is a legal crime, isn't it?"

"A felony, my dear."

"And if Mr. Brodie had lived they would have taken him into custody."

"Undoubtedly."

Her lips blanched at that.

"Then, as he is not available, and you are the only representative of the firm left, they may, they—may make you the scapegoat."

"There is nothing surer than that," came from between Walter Heron's pale lips. "It is only a question of hours."

"Oh, father!" cried Beatrice, and her tone was sharp with anguish. "How dreadful, how wrong, how cruelly unjust!"

"They won't look at it like that, I'm afraid," said Walter Heron, as he rose to his feet.

"But you were ignorant of it all, weren't you?"

"Not wholly ignorant, always protesting and inwardly disapproving. But Brodie was a strong man. He seldom asked advice, and when he did, never took it unless it happened to coincide with his inclinations."

"Well, when they understand that——"

"It will probably increase the offence, my dear. There are certain circumstances in which ignorance, like forgetfulness, is a crime. That is where I stand. It is a terrible position. For myself what does it matter? I am an old, broken man, though I had hoped to keep the name clean to the end. But for you and Ida, and Wally——"

"And Lotta," put in Beatrice, surprised that he had not included her stepmother in the list.

"She will not feel it in the same way. She isn't a Heron, you see, besides her standard is different——"

It summed up the woman whom Walter Heron, in one of those moments of strange aberration which come to most men in sex affairs at some period of their lives, had elected to put in the place of his children's mother. That he had had very little happiness out of that queer marriage he regarded as his own just recompense for a foolish act. In spite of his dreamy incompetency, he had a singular clearness of vision, like Beatrice, concerning some of the larger issues of life, especially those affecting temperament and conduct.

"I sent for you, my dear, because I need the strongest, most unbiased judgment, as well as sympathy. I know I can count on yours," he said, as he rose to his feet.

"I have plenty of sympathy, father, but no judgment at the moment," said Beatrice drearily. "I'm just a woman desperately afraid. When they know—what will happen, father?"

"Arrest," he said briefly, but without blanching. "But I have sent for you really to ask if you will go with me out to Linnorie."

"Out to Linnorie, to that stricken house! Oh, father, won't they think it an intrusion?"

"I can't help that, my dear, it is necessary that we go. There may be papers in Brodie's library it would be better for me to retain. And anyhow, it is the least we can do for the family. It is the right thing to do. Will you come?"

"Why, of course, but how; are there trains?" she asked vaguely, and he felt her shrinking inwardly from the ordeal.

"Trains are of no use, you know the mile and a half walk at the other end. I shouldn't be able for it, nor, I believe, would you. I have rung up for a car. It should be here by now, yes, there it is!"

He walked quite steadily across the room to a small cupboard in the wall, where behind closed doors hung his coat and hat, and muffler and umbrella. Beatrice mechanically moved to his side and helped him on with his coat, even taking a worn old brush from the little

shelf inside the cupboard and removing some small specks of dust.

It was as if a pall of thick darkness had descended on life, something too awful to be spoken about, but only to be faced.

It was a cruel ordeal for a young woman of four and twenty, but the shock over, she would marshal her forces and stand up to the consequences. Walter Heron made no mistake when he sent for his elder daughter in his hour of supreme need, he knew on whom he could depend.

Downstairs, he looked into the room where a middle-aged clerk, white-faced and obviously shaken by the catastrophe which had overtaken the firm, was playing futilely with his ledger and his pen.

"I'm going out to Linnorie, Dunlop," said Mr. Heron. "Just carry on till I come back. Answer no questions, or at least as few as you can, and if anyone authorised inquires where I am"—he nodded significantly—"tell them I'm at Linnorie."

Beatrice shivered at these words, believing her father referred to police officers, who might be already on his track. But the arm of the law is strong and sure rather than hurried, and as yet was not out to take a grip of Walter Heron's shrinking shoulders.

They got into the taxi and bowled off, the destination already having been arranged for over the telephone.

The rain had ceased with almost startling suddenness, and the sky was breaking, while great masses of cloud rolling northwards to the sea, indicated a brief return of fine weather.

Patches of pale, turquoise-coloured blue, the spring blue, were appearing between the rifts in the ragged clouds, and the whole atmosphere brightening. It did not cheer Beatrice much, though she was sensitive to weather changes as all lovers of the open are.

"How strange, father, that we should be going to Linnorie like this!" she said, as they rolled quickly and smoothly by way of the Bridges out to the Liberton road. "I was trying to think, I haven't been there since Mrs. Brodie gave that garden party, two and a half years ago."

"Neither have I. It will hurt going back like this, my dear, but we shall get through it. I felt myself a broken man an hour ago. Already you've done me good. It's a wonderful quality you possess, Beatrice."

"What is that, father? I don't feel that I possess anything at this moment, not even myself."

"You inspire confidence and hope in others, my dear," her father answered, and with that, silence fell on them which was not broken until they reached the low iron gateway at Linnorie.

It was a small estate, but full-flavoured with both history and romance. Through that modest gateway, redeemed from complete mediocrity by the old stone pillars, surmounted by the arms of the Herons, carved in solid stone, refugees had poured in the old covenanting days, when the holes and caves of the Pentlands held their living protest against tyranny and oppression in matters pertaining to the soul.

Later, when the flame of independence and of hope swept across Scotland once more, Prince Charlie and his immediate counsellors had slept the night in the old grey house nestling in the lap of the hills, and had left grateful recognition of much hospitable kindness received there. The story of the Heron family was one inseparably woven in with the weft of Scottish history, and though they had fallen on evil days their quality remained; nor ever would be eradicated because it was an essence that belongs to imperishable things.

The Brodies had perpetrated one atrocity at Linnorie. They had demolished the small, low broad lodge of grey stone at the gate, and erected on the site a new one, which somehow hit the eye which approached it, and took away from the simple dignity of the entrance.

The grey and mossy old gateway and the garish new stone did not sort, that was all. Beatrice turned her eyes away from it involuntarily as the taxi swept through the open gates.

The soft gravel of the drive bore the impress of recent wheel marks, and about the whole place there seemed to brood an atmosphere of apprehension mingled with horror.

The trees were bare but budding, for the winter had been mild and open. Already small spring flowers had been surprised into untimely bloom, and in the trees sounded the sweet, low twitter of hopeful birds.

The woods were sparse, and the park in no way noble, the singular charm of the house lay in its site. The hills rolled back from behind it like the waves of the sea, while in front, from the higher upper windows, there was a noble panorama, stretching across to other hills huddled in the near distance towards Edinburgh, then the city and beyond, the spreading river, with all the enchanting vista of its further shores. The house was long and low, with two wings which gave the idea of a courtyard in front. There were creeping things about its hoary walls, and a nail-studded door and latticed windows, long and narrow and high, which made it a picture artists loved to study.

The door was open. No one appeared when the taxi rolled up to the front entrance, nor when Heron and his daughter, after knocking once, walked into the house. Heron felt that in the circumstances he might take that liberty, the moment being urgent, even tragic.

"What shall we do now?" asked Beatrice in a whisper. "Ah, here comes someone!"

A scared servant girl, white to the lips, came through a swing door covered in red baize which shut off the kitchen premises from the oak panelled and raftered front hall.

It was Beatrice who took the situation in hand.

"I am Miss Heron," she said clearly. "My father is here with me. Can we go upstairs. Is there anyone who can talk to us?"

"Yes, no—I don't know. The mistress is in her own room and Miss Monica is with her. I'm feared to go up—the police are there—ben there in the library."

Beatrice turned to her father, and he immediately took the initiative, walking towards the library door, Beatrice following. She never forgot that moment nor the poignant scene in the library, which used to be the happy living-room of the Herons in the far-back days which had held no hint or prevision of this tragedy.

The windows opened on the back of the house, and no blinds were drawn. Three men were in the room besides the still figure, covered with a white sheet on the great wide Chesterfield couch, which stood between the two long mullioned windows.

They were the sergeant of police and a plain clothes officer, and Doctor Lumgair, from the neighbouring little town.

At sight of the Herons, the doctor, a tall, spare man, with a thin, clever face and grey hair, looked slightly relieved, and coming forward, shook hands silently with them both.

"Bad business this, Mr. Heron."

"It is," Heron answered, but his attention was focused on the police inspector, who at sound of his name turned round rather sharply, eyeing him narrowly. Heron stepped forward.

"I am Mr. Heron, Mr. Brodie's partner," he said, in a clear, low voice. "I came directly the message reached me at York Place. If there is anything I can do——"

The inspector, who was as yet in complete ignorance of any motive for the tragedy, courteously bowed.

"Thank you, sir. Later, I've no doubt, you'll be needed, but in the meantime all I have got to do is to report the affair and seal Mr. Brodie's personal effects."

"Oh," said Heron, and his lips went dry. "The desk, you mean?"

The inspector nodded. Heron cast a glance of infinite compassion at the sofa where lay the rigid figure of the man who had been his partner, but never his friend.

"Then there is really nothing I can do," he said, with a shrinking note in his voice.

"Nothing just now, come outside, Mr. Heron," said the doctor. "We need not disturb the police at their work."

Heron and his daughter, evidently relieved, stepped back into the warmth and comfort of the little wide hall.

"How is poor Mrs. Brodie and her daughter?" he asked.

"Prostrated. It was altogether unexpected. Can you furnish a motive, Mr. Heron? Mr. Brodie always

seemed to me to be the last man who would take his own life. He was a breezy, cheerful individual. I often remarked on it to my wife. Nothing came amiss to him, and he certainly had not been out of health."

"Business affairs," said Heron in a queer, jerky way, which made the doctor look at him attentively. He then saw how grey his face had become, how the features and figure seemed to have shrunk.

"I'm sorry to hear that, Mr. Heron, for the sake of the living as well as the dead. May I as an old friend, express the hope that his troubles were confined to himself alone, without involving you."

"I was his partner, doctor. I'm afraid I shall not escape," said Heron quietly.

Before the doctor could reply or comment on this pregnant statement they were arrested by a figure on the stairs. It was Mrs. Brodie, tall, sweeping, commanding, her pale, large-featured face looking at them out of sombre eyes.

"I want to speak to you, Mr. Heron," she said curtly. "Will you come up to my boudoir?"

CHAPTER III

A GLANCE passed between Heron and his daughter, and without greeting or question to Mrs. Brodie, Beatrice followed him up the stairs. She had a strange feeling towards her father, something that was at once poignant and passing sweet. He needed her as never before in his whole life, the mothering instinct was awakened that day in Beatrice Heron never to sleep again.

The tall figure reached the landing, they following, along a richly-carpeted corridor to a door at the farther end, through which they passed into the boudoir, an octagonal room, exquisitely upholstered in light oak and pale green satin brocade.

It was Mrs. Brodie, slightly imperious, who motioned them both in, and with her own hand closed the door.

"I hope you can throw some light on this terrible business, Mr. Heron," she began without preamble. If she grieved there was no outward sign. Her face looked as if carved out of marble. It was not a sweet face, but it showed strength of character and of will, and undoubted courage. That was the quality Beatrice admired in her at the moment, for she herself was trembling without and within.

Heron moistened his dry lips.

"The only light I can throw on it, Mrs. Brodie, is that some of your husband's plans and schemes miscarried, and that, seeing disaster in front, he could not stand up to it."

Somehow he had not expected this addition to his already heavy burden. He had always imagined that Brodie's wife would be his confidante in all the schemes whereby the ambitions she fully shared could be furthered.

"Why do you speak in the singular, Mr. Heron?" asked Mrs. Brodie very pointedly. "You were his

partner. What schemes or plans could my husband possibly have outside your knowledge or sanction ? ”

“ He had a good many latterly. I could not follow him through the mazes of his financial and other operations.”

“ Why could you not follow him ? It was your duty to follow him, to advise, and restrain him if possible, and put the brake on. Why did you not do that ? ”

“ I was not equal to the task, madam. Mr. Brodie had a commanding personality.”

“ Commanding fudge,” she cried, with a sudden queer lapse into common everyday language. “ I was not afraid of Mr. Brodie, he was always amenable to my advice.”

“ Then, pardon me, did he not acquaint you with most of his business affairs ? ”

“ He did not. Whatever Mr. Brodie may have been outside, and that people will blame him I don’t doubt—he was a perfect husband and father. He left his worries and cares on the doorstep, and brought only the sunshine in.”

At this splendid tribute to the dead man Beatrice Heron’s eyes suddenly overflowed, and she turned away to hide her tears before Mrs. Brodie could observe them.

“ You were his partner, and, I repeat it, you ought to have made it your business to know what was going on, and to have applied the brake,” she proceeded mercilessly. “ You were very culpable, Mr. Heron, and you cannot be acquitted from censure or blame.”

“ I am not likely to be, Mrs. Brodie,” replied Heron simply. “ I am trying to prepare myself for the inevitable.”

“ Tell me only this, it is what I asked you to come up for. Will there be a public inquiry ? Will everything come out in the papers ? ”

“ I am afraid so.”

“ And what will happen to you ? ”

“ I shall probably be arrested.”

A queer spasm crossed her rigid features.

“ It is a dreadful business for us all,” she said, but

spoke no word of sympathy to those whose plight was the greater.

Heron looked round helplessly.

"Perhaps we'd better go, Beatrice. We are of little use here. I wanted to come to express my sympathy."

"Sympathy will not help us in this crisis, Mr. Heron," came back promptly from Mrs. Brodie's lips. "What I would rather have had from you is the swift, firm action which would have rendered the offer of sympathy unnecessary."

Beatrice turned at that, her still wet eyes flashing. "You have no right to speak like that to my father, Mrs. Brodie. He may yet have the worst of it. It is not a moment for recrimination, but for co-operation and help. I can't forgive you, I'm sure I never shall! Come, father, as you say, we had better go, we ought never to have come." She put her hand through his arm and drew him towards the door, while Mrs. Brodie regarded her as if seeing her for the first time.

Tense with indignation, the colour had risen in Beatrice Heron's face, and her slender figure seemed to have acquired a striking dignity.

"I can dispense with your forgiveness, Miss Heron," said Mrs. Brodie with icy curtness. "I have my own sorrows left. My son, serving his country, will have to hear of how his father died. My daughter will have to face the future under a cloud which your father might have rendered impossible by the exercise of a little firmness."

"Come, father," said Beatrice, clearly not trusting herself to further speech. They went with that, and somehow it struck her what a sorry spectacle it all was, the house of death poisoned and rendered more terrible by the hate and scorn of the living.

She made her father get into the taxi first, and when she had seated herself she pushed her hand through his arm.

"Never mind, old dear. She didn't mean the half of it. One could see that she is partly distraught."

"Not distraught, there was a most unearthly calm about her, Beatrice, and we can't get away from the fact that it was the truth she spoke."

Beatrice had no answer ready to that. In front there were spectres, dreadful spectres of prison cells, courts of justice, sentence and merciful oblivion. And all because of some strange strain of weakness in her father's most lovable personality, the weakness which public opinion would label as a crime.

Beatrice Heron lived centuries of poignant feeling during that brief ride back to Edinburgh. By common consent they returned to the offices in York Place. Heron's pathetic eagerness to stand up to his dereliction from the straight path Beatrice did not seek to combat.

It was useless, anyhow. The consequences had to be faced.

Nothing happened that day at all at York Place. The evening papers came out with startling head-lines, and the brief notice of Brodie's tragic end contained a hint of further developments.

Beatrice remained with her father at York Place the whole afternoon. Somehow life and the world had narrowed until it held only one solitary tragic figure.

She sent out about one o'clock for some strong coffee and sandwiches, and made her father eat and drink, taking a little herself, aware that physical strength has to be sustained when such a drain is made on the mental and moral force.

Between four and five she suggested that they should go home.

"Hadn't I better stop here, dear, in case I'm wanted?" he asked.

"No," said Beatrice decisively. "They know where to find you. And we shall have to tell Lotta and Ida. I'm rather glad that Wally can't be told just yet."

Heron's only son, after a considerable spell of ill-health, had been advised by the family doctor to leave Scotland. A relative of his stepmother, who had done well on a sheep farm in New Zealand, had invited him to come out for a year for the purpose of establishing his health. It was just possible now that he might remain altogether in New Zealand. He was writing happy and interested letters, and liked both the country and the people he was with. It had been a blow to Heron to

part with his son, who was intended to follow his own profession. The Herons for four generations had followed the profession of the law, some of them had been distinguished ornaments of it. Wally himself had hated leaving Scotland. He had been a gentle, studious boy, sharing all Stevenson's love for his country, and passionately attached to its literature and tradition. The one thing which had resigned him to New Zealand had been the knowledge that he would find so many of his compatriots there.

They left the office about the usual time and walked to the car which would take them within ten minutes' walk of their own home.

They did not talk at all in the car. Heron seemed to shrink into his corner, as if fearing that suspicious eyes were already concentrated on him. This, of course, was absurd. As yet no one had connected him with the tragedy reported in the evening papers.

All the clouds had cleared by the time they left the car, and the sky was hardening, while the air had a fresh tang in it, suggestive of coming frost. The wind was due north, whipping the waves of the Forth into little flecks of foam. As they walked away from the car terminus, preparing to descend the slope to the quiet thoroughfare in which "The Outlook" stood, Heron spoke nervously.

"Lotta will be frightfully upset, Beatrice. How am I to tell her?"

"I will tell her, if you like," said Beatrice bravely. "You mustn't be worried or further agitated, father. You will need all your strength perhaps to-morrow."

Her spirit quailed at the vista called up by these simple words, and she saw her father wince.

As they reached the gate he stood still a moment, looking down the slope to the sea, which was all alive and turbulent instead of grey and still as it had been in the morning.

"Life's a queer thing, Beatrice. Some of us are badly equipped for it. Something seems to have been left out of me. Look what a failure I've been."

"No, no, father," said Beatrice, clinging to his arm. "You have not made money, perhaps——"

"No, only lost it," he said, with a slight edge of bitterness in his voice. "I seem to have lost everything, Linnorie, and all the patrimony my father left to me, then your mother, and now this——"

"You have kept our love, dear father," said Beatrice quickly. "All our love, that is something, is it not?"

"It is everything, thank God! If I am not robbed of that I can still face the future, however dark. I am not so sure of Lotta, though," he said, with his long, slender hand on the fastening of the gate. "She is different. I am afraid she will blame me very much. You see, she thought I was much better off than I really was when we married. We must allow something for that disappointment."

It was as if he sought to prepare Beatrice for a somewhat trying interview which he ought to spare her, but yet, somehow, did not know how. Beatrice was not in the least afraid of the interview with her stepmother. Compared with the other issues at stake, her attitude towards the family crisis did not seem of much account.

"Don't worry about that, father. Just slip into your den and have a good smoke, and I will find Lotta and Ida too, if she is in the house, and tell all they need to be told. We need not, perhaps, anticipate what may happen to-morrow. After all, perhaps it may not happen."

Heron shook his head.

"I do not see what is to avert it," he said, and his voice faltered. "Say that again, my dear."

"Say what, father?" asked Beatrice very gently.

"Say that I have kept your love, all your love."

"But of course you have, and Wally's last letter, didn't that please you? It was full of affection from beginning to end."

"Yes, it was; yes, it was! Perhaps we shall not meet again. I will read it over to-night. He said a great many kind things in it about his old father. They will give me courage for the blackest day in my life."

Beatrice gently urged him up the path, he opened the door with his latch-key, and they passed in. It was

grey dark in the little hall, and there was no sound or sign of life in the house.

Heron hung up his coat and hat, and rather hurriedly passed across the hall to the small morning-room at the back which he used as a study and sanctum. His wife was in the dining-room, the light shone from under the door.

Beatrice, without going upstairs to remove her hat, hung up her macintosh and entered the dining-room. At the table, trimming a hat with some bright-coloured velvet and a bunch of feathers, was a short, stout woman, with masses of fair hair, lightish blue eyes, and the remains of a good complexion. She had been a pretty girl in her teens, and, a clerk in an insurance office, had attracted Walter Heron's attention, when he was over fifty. Fifty is the dangerous age, some contend, in a man's life, when he is clinging desperately to the remnant of his youth, and struggling against the inexorable advance of late middle life.

She was a somewhat underbred creature, good-natured when things went well with her, but peevish and selfish when they did not.

She had been deeply disappointed in her marriage, and had sunk into that wearing kind of person, a consistent and habitual grumbler. There was no active hostility between her and her stepdaughters, neither, however, was there any sympathy or understanding. They secretly despised her, at least Beatrice did, while she thought them stiff, starched, and uninteresting. She was also a little jealous of their father's love for them, and sometimes relations were a little strained. She merely glanced up when Beatrice entered, and, biting off her thread, said casually :

" Where have you been all day ? "

" At the office mostly."

" At the office ! But why ? Didn't I hear your father come in with you ? "

Beatrice nodded, closed the door, and drawing in a chair at the side of the table, looked her stepmother very straightly in the face, wondering how she would receive the news, how she would stand up to what might easily

be supreme disaster. All would depend on the nature and extent of the defalcations, and in how far the authorities would hold the surviving partner responsible.

"Why do you stare at me like that, Bee? Is there anything the matter? My hair perhaps—I've been trying to get this hat right all the afternoon. It's been on and off my head a dozen times. I'd like you to advise, you always have the knack."

"It's all right Lotta, but there's trouble coming. It's here now, you haven't seen an evening paper, I suppose?"

"How could I? I haven't been anywhere to see it. Hasn't your father brought one home?"

"No. Mr. Brodie shot himself this morning at Linnorie."

"What?" Mrs. Heron nearly jumped off her chair in her shock of surprise. "Shot himself!" she repeated. "Whatever for?"

"Financial troubles. It is better just to tell you the whole truth at once, I think. He had made use of some trust funds."

"Embezzled! stolen them, you mean?" said Mrs. Heron, and her light blue eyes narrowed into a singular shrewdness.

"Exactly, and, afraid of the consequences, he took his own life."

"Oh, I shouldn't have thought he was that kind of man—he had plenty of savvy and cocksureness. How did you hear all this?"

"Father sent down for me this morning. I went out to Linnorie with him."

"Oh, indeed, why didn't he send for me? I ought to have been there. It was surely more my business than yours."

"It was not a pleasant experience, Lotta," Beatrice assured her.

"Did you see Mrs. Brodie?"

Beatrice nodded.

"How has she taken it?"

"She is very much upset, naturally, and she blames father."

Beatrice said this purposely and it had the desired effect.

"How, or why does she blame him? There isn't anything crooked about your father. He's only soft where money is concerned. If he hadn't been he never would have been out of Linnorie, and these people in it."

"Father ought to have known, she thinks, and ought to have prevented it. It is the view likely to be taken by the authorities."

Lotta's eyes opened wider.

"You're trying to tell me something, Beatrice. Speak out! I'm not afraid to face the music. What has actually happened? Did I hear your father come in, or is he in gaol?"

Beatrice winced, and her colour rose.

"He is in the den, but what you say may happen to-morrow, we can't tell. We have to prepare for the worst, while hoping for the best."

Mrs. Heron's face was a study. She could not and did not feel the disgrace so keenly as her stepdaughter, what concerned her was the swift decline of material prosperity. She had never been very well satisfied with the little house overlooking the Forth. She had not married a comparatively old man "saddled with a ready-made family," as she expressed it, for such a meagre destiny. Her face hardened, she had not the love for her husband which would have raised her to supreme heights of sacrifice, which would have shielded him and shared with him to the uttermost. With her marriage had been a purely commercial transaction. She imagined that she was marrying into both affluence and good society, and the extreme simplicity of the Herons' lives had secretly enraged her.

"I must say," she observed slowly, as she swept her millinery materials into her big work-basket, "your father has let us, but especially me, down badly. What has he to say for himself?"

CHAPTER IV

THE question angered Beatrice, and quick words rose to her lips.

They were not spoken, however, for at the moment the door opened, and her father entered, followed by Ida.

Her name was Isabella, a name which had been in the Heron family for generations. It was the girl herself who had changed it, calling it old-fashioned and cumbersome. This had happened immediately after she left the school where she had been partially educated and where snobbery reigned supreme.

Parents are not perhaps always careful enough of their choice of a school for their daughters. The impress received there is apt to remain, certainly it colours their thoughts, imaginations and actions at a very vital period of their lives.

Somewhat early widowed, and with no sisters of his own to advise him, Walter Heron had taken the line of least resistance, and sent Isabella to the school she wished to go to. It was expensive, without being efficient. It had done harm to the girl, leaving her superficial, very partially educated, and out of touch with her own home. She never forgot for a moment that she was a Heron of Linnorie. In the secret recesses of her soul Beatrice remembered it too, but to different ends. Ida's pretty face was gloomy, and her eyes furious. Beatrice immediately guessed that she knew either the whole truth or sufficient to upset her.

It was Ida who spoke, smoothing out a crushed copy of a late evening paper.

"They are bawling our name in the streets," she cried in a thick whisper. "And father says it's all true."

"Show me the paper!" said Lotta imperiously, and Ida handed it over. It was only a few lines in the stop

press column, saying that further developments were expected concerning the suicide of Alexander Compton Brodie, and that well-known names were likely to be involved in the sensation. Heron's name as partner in the firm was mentioned.

Beatrice paled then, and her eyes became mute with anguish.

What merely angered the other two selfish and superficial hearts filled her with sympathy and tenderness too profound for utterance. She was, indeed, amazed at the swift passing of the fear for herself which had been prominent earlier in that fateful day. As for her father! It was the Gethsemane of Walter Heron's life. If he had ever injured or hurt a human being he paid for it in full that awful day.

Lotta tossed the paper to the floor.

"So we're done!" she said shrilly. "My God, I never thought I had married into this."

"Be quiet, woman!" cried Beatrice with a high, imperious, compelling note in her clear, young voice. "Can't you see that father has got about as much as he can stand for one day? Where is he to get sympathy and help if not here? We have got to help one another."

Isabella looked at her father's shrinking figure with a clear scorn and no softening. She was youth embodied and envisaged in that supreme selfishness which is one of the great driving forces of life. But it is cruel and relentless as the grave.

It was Beatrice who put her arm in his once more, and drew him away from the hostile eyes of the two women. She drew him back to the small, warm hearth at the back of the house, and closed the door.

She set him down there and knelt by his side, folding her strong, warm hands over his nerveless fingers, and tried to infuse her strength and courage and purpose into him. Of hope there was little to spare, for even to her young strength and the dauntless courage that had characterised her race through all its history, the coming day seemed void of hope. "Never mind them, father! It is because they do not understand," she whispered, chafing the cold hands. The sadness of the spectacle

presented by this broken man could override her desire to see him stand up more courageously to the terrible issue.

"To-morrow," he said, in a queer, voiceless whisper. "Perhaps they will come to-night."

"If they do we shall be ready for them," said Beatrice clearly. "Don't let us dwell too much on it. It is wonderful how courage will come, courage and resource for the new day."

Beatrice did not know where she got the words.

"Preaching," she might have said, was "not in her line," but these were the words which came, and she had a sudden strange sense of nearness to her mother. She wondered whether her father felt that nearness, but feared to ask, lest it might add poignance to his suffering.

Suddenly he spoke, sending the arrows of thought darting in new directions, but not towards deliverance.

"What is haunting me is the thought of those who will suffer through all this, not here, though that is cruel enough, but the innocent people, widows perhaps, and little children, who trusted us because of the old name and standing. Oh, Beatrice, don't you see them, an unending procession with mournful, haunting eyes and empty purses and fireless grates!"

Beatrice saw them. Already that procession had marshalled itself before her mental vision. There are hours and days so crowded that the whole impressions and experience of a lifetime seem to be crowded into them. Beatrice Heron had lived ages since the grey noon when she had been summoned to her father's side.

"Listen, darling," she said, still chafing his hands. "Perhaps it will not be so bad as you think and expect. Nothing ever is really when you face it bravely. Do you remember how we felt about leaving Linnorie, we thought it the end of all things. And how we got to quite love this little house? To-morrow it will be like that. The worst never really happens."

He listened with avidity to her every word, his eyes never wavering from her face.

"And listen, father, there is something else. We shall pay it back among us—I will dedicate myself to it—I am

young and strong, and I will make money somehow, and pay it back to the uttermost farthing. We'll clear our name."

He listened with brightening eyes. What basis she had for her strong hope and courage he knew not, but her inspiration got home.

"If only they leave me my freedom, that is what I would dedicate the remainder of my life to. We could live even more simply and save every penny," he said eagerly.

"I will go out and work. I have often wished to do it, and now, when there is a necessity, I will find the way," said Beatrice resolutely. "I think you will go to bed soon, father. I will go and see whether Lizzie can get you something on a tray. You shan't come in and sit through supper. I know it would end in your eating nothing at all. I'll look after you myself, and put you to bed as if you were my bairn."

She smiled as she leaped to her feet, seeing in front that definite action which is God's panacea for despair, "Something to do!" That is the first and greatest need for every soul, even the most elemental. Before she left him she unlaced his boots, got his slippers, and then went to the kitchen, where she was reminded that it was Lizzie's night out. She was glad, since it relieved her of the need of any explanation or of trying to put the best face on things. She turned up the gas, went into the little larder to forage for food. There was not much, for the Herons were not well off, and Lotta an indifferent housekeeper and caterer. She looked at the remains of a cold joint with distaste; a little bit of fish left over from breakfast, some eggs and cold potatoes suggested the concoction of a small savoury dish. With swift, light hand she gathered all the ingredients, and soon the appetising odour began to permeate the little house. It reached the nostrils of the two discussing the situation in the dining room, and presently Beatrice was interrupted in her task by her stepmother, come to investigate the unusual cooking operations at least an hour and a half before their usual eating time.

"What are you doing, Bee?"

"Getting something for father to eat," she answered clearly. "He had no lunch. All he has had since breakfast is a sandwich and a cup of coffee I sent out to Ramages for. He ate it in the office. Then I'm going to get him to bed."

Lotta sniffed.

"I don't see that in the circumstances he can expect all this coddling. He has let us down pretty considerably, you'll admit that."

"I don't admit anything," said Beatrice stubbornly. "And I don't want to talk about it."

"But I do," said Lotta, quite as stubbornly. "And I mean to, that's more. You needn't be so high-handed, young lady. There are other people in this horrid business to be considered besides you and your father."

Beatrice said neither yea nor nay, but her level brows slightly contracted.

"Supposing the worst comes to the worst, and they arrest your father and sentence him to imprisonment—I believe that is what happens to people who misuse trust money—I remember the City of Glasgow bank though you don't—what will become of us?"

Beatrice made no answer, but vigorously stirred her savoury concoction in the saucepan.

"What I want to know is whether they can impound all our belongings, the furniture and silver and our clothes, such as they are. Are we entitled to anything?"

"I don't know," answered Beatrice in a muffled voice. "They can take them all if they like for me."

"It's very easy for you to speak, you're young, and I've no doubt you'll get some man to marry you if you take a little trouble to play your cards well."

Beatrice suddenly lifted the saucepan and dumped it down again with a rather loud bang. She wanted to scream out, or order this mouthing woman out of the kitchen, yet must do neither. Lotta had to be endured, just endured, and allowed to meander on.

"I don't think there will be very much chance for you now, Bee; you're getting on, you know, you'll soon be twenty-five and you've gone off in looks lately. Men

don't like your stand-offish ways, I've heard 'em say it. You'll have to alter your tactics."

"So will you," said Beatrice in a low voice. "If you want to talk about my marriage, it may interest you to hear that I don't intend ever to marry."

"Most old maids say that," piped Lotta with her self-sufficient smile. "I said it myself."

"I've got something more serious and bigger altogether to do with my life," continued Beatrice calmly. "So please leave me out of the count."

"Sounds all right, but that kind of high-falutin talk don't lead anywhere. Every woman wants to get married; all the other things she talks of doing or wanting to do are just makeshifts. Ida's rather pretty—now, though my! hasn't she got a temper! She's rampaging round the dining-room like a little bull of Bashan. Of course it'll hit her hard, but then, as I told her, she's pretty enough to disarm folk, and she must look out for an eligible husband. I wouldn't mind helping her, I used to know quite a lot of the right sort, men with money and brains too, but what can anybody see in this dull hole? I don't know whether it's all to the bad after all. At least it's lifted us out of the deadly routine which has just about finished me."

Beatrice took the hot plate out of the oven and began to dish up her little meal.

Remembering that her father had had no tea she had made him a cup of fragrant China. They had carried just a few individual tastes away from their former estate, love for the delicate flavour of China tea was one. Lotta never touched it, she kept what she called her own separate brew, a strong, black brand of Ceylon, of which she consumed inordinate quantities at all hours of the day. It was a relic of her life in an office, where many privileges had been accorded to the women clerks, where, indeed, their employers had been rather afraid of them.

"I'll take that in if you like," said Lotta, regarding the tray rather admiringly, wondering at the deft quick touch which had got it all prepared so quickly and satisfactorily.

Beatrice hesitated. She had really no right to keep her father's wife away from him, but she was afraid.

"He's very downcast, Lotta," she said gently. "And I don't think he should be encouraged to talk any more. What he wants is sleep."

"I shan't try to keep him from sleeping," said Lotta, recovering part of her good nature. "But you take it if you want to. I shan't intrude. I'll go out, I think. I haven't been out all day, and it's fine now, Ida says. We'll go out together, up west, anything to get away from the atmosphere here."

"Oh yes, do," said Beatrice feverishly. "Then I'll get father comfortably to bed and things won't look so black, perhaps, after you come in."

Lotta shook her head.

"I don't see where any betterment is to come from. It's a rotten business, but between you and me and the kitchen grate," she said, with a little touch of vulgarity which made Beatrice shrink a little, "I'm not sorry Madame Compton Brodie has got a bit of a set-down. I'll get even with her yet about her patronising way at that garden party, and the things she said when I went to pay my party call."

Beatrice, seeing an endless vista of reminiscent small talk in the offing, lifted her tray and made a move out of the kitchen. Lotta followed her with her eyes but made no attempt to accompany her. She sauntered back to the dining-room where Ida was crouching over the fire, a figure of gloom and rebellion, all her superficial prettiness gone from her face.

"Well, what does he say now?" she asked without looking round.

"Oh, I haven't seen him, that's Bee cooking baked meats for him. There isn't enough to go round. Let's go out, Ida, up west. I'll treat you to a bit of hot supper at a restaurant, and we might look in at one of the shows for half an hour or so."

Ida looked round astonished at the suggestion, yet allured by it. "Would it do, Lotta? It looks rather heartless."

"I don't know about the heartlessness. We're not

likely to do anybody much good mooning about here all the evening, snapping one another's heads off. What we need is something to take us out of ourselves and away from this horrible business. After everything comes out and the piper has been paid, in more ways than one, we'll probably have to go down to the gutter. Let's go now, kid, and try and forget it."

There was just one human touch in the woman's words, and her glance at Ida's distressed face was one of kindness. The girl jumped up.

"All right, come on! I'll go mad or scream or do something dreadful if I've to stop mooning about here, as you call it, all the evening, but Bee will certainly think we've gone out of our minds."

"That's a matter of no consequence," her stepmother said airily. "Besides, I've told her. She's going to be busy getting your father to bed. She likes that sort of thing. I'll just pop up and slip into my big ulster, then I needn't change; you'll do as you are."

They were out of the house in about five minutes' time without disturbing the other two members of the family. Beatrice was glad and relieved to find that her father thoroughly enjoyed the little meal she had prepared for him. His gratitude was quite touching. His eyes followed her about with a kind of silent worship which struck the wrong note, somehow. She loved him beyond any one on earth except her brother Wally, but she did not want him to be so dependent.

Far rather would she have seen him standing up, squaring his shoulders to the calamity that had overtaken them. What she did not realise was that his day among men was over, and that the end was in sight.

"I thought I heard the front door, Beatrice," he said. "Has anybody gone out?"

"Probably Lotta and Ida. She did say something about it."

"Where can they be going at this time of night?"

"Possibly for a walk, dear. It isn't very late, only half-past seven. Now drink your tea and I'll go and put a nice hot bottle in your bed and bring your pyjamas down here to warm."

She had the true mothering instinct, which considers all the trifles contributory to material comfort.

A warm glow began to suffuse Walter Heron's whole being. He felt comforted without and within. But when he was ready for bed at last and Beatrice stole up to see him there and to turn down his light she was struck by his exceeding paleness, by the drawn lines about his eyes and mouth. The Herons were not grumblers, that strain had been left out of their composition. When the days were dark they knew how to hold their tongues and to turn their faces to the weather.

"Are you quite all right, dear? Is there anything else I can do for you?" she asked tenderly.

He smiled gratefully up into her face.

"Nothing my child; you have done all! I shall sleep, I think. Peace has descended, whatever its source. I am not afraid any more about to-morrow. I shall be ready for the call, whatever it is. God bless you, and give you your heart's desire."

The girl's lip quivered as she bent over to kiss him. Then she lowered the gas to a small peep, closed the door softly and slipped downstairs. What was her heart's desire? There could only be one at the moment—that the coming day might be less awful and unendurable than it promised to be.

She concentrated on this desire, and if it be true that "prayer is the heart's sincere desire, uttered or unexpressed," then most certainly Beatrice Heron prayed.

She busied herself about some household tasks, removing the remnant of the fire from the study to the dining-room in the practice of the small economies which circumstances of late had rendered absolutely necessary in the house. Then she sat down with a writing pad on her knee to try and write a letter to Wally. Long before it reached him across the dividing seas, supposing she ever finished it, the die would be cast, the final issue decided. But the mere setting down of the tragic events of the day somehow steadied her. She did not miss Ida or their stepmother, nay, she was glad to be free of their complaints for a space. There were hours and days in front, she was fully aware, which would be vibrant with them.

But towards ten o'clock, very tired, she began to wonder about them, and to long for their return. About a quarter to ten Lizzie Henderson, the maid, came in by the front door. Beatrice went to welcome her with quite evident pleasure. Lizzie was an elemental creature, hailing from the slums of old Edinburgh, but she had a heart of gold. She had come from one of the Shelters for needy ones, and was a faithful worker, though it was doubtful whether she had in her the makings of a really good servant. But help of any kind within the wages the Herons could pay was difficult to obtain, and they were glad to retain her by overlooking most of her shortcomings. It was for love of Beatrice, however, that Lizzie stayed on. She had, in her own blunt vernacular, "nae use for the auld mistress."

"Have you had a nice evening, Lizzie?"

"Oh ay, Miss Bee, no sae bad. Me an' anither lassie went to the music hall."

"And was it a good show?"

"Ay, fine, we had to come oot before the end. I saw the mistress and Miss Ida there."

"What!" Beatrice started back, much shocked.

"I think you must have made a mistake, Lizzie."

"Nae fear, they was in the third row, and the mistress had on her hat wi' the red feather," said Lizzie with evident enjoyment of the sensation she was creating.

"We needn't expect them for some time then. Just see that the kettle is left on the hob and put a bit more coal on, Lizzie. Then, when you've had your supper, slip up quietly to your bed, so as not to disturb the master."

"Is he no weel?" asked Lizzie sympathetically.

"He has had a very tiring day, but I hope he is going to have a good night." Beatrice did not wait up for the late-comers. Leaving a supper tray for them on the dining room table, she went up to her own bed about half-past ten, first tip-toeing into her father's room to see how he fared. The sound of his long, low, regular breathing filled the room, and as Beatrice brushed out the long waves of her beautiful hair, she thanked God for the merciful benediction of sleep.

By eleven she, too, fell on sleep, and did not hear the revellers come in. It seemed as if she had quite a long, dreamless, restful night, when she was awakened by someone tugging at her shoulder, and her stepmother's agitated voice in her ear.

"Bee! Bee! come quick! I can't awaken your father. There's something wrong with him!"

Beatrice sprang up. The lighted candle Lotta held in her hand revealed the ungainly figure in an ugly plaid dressing gown, shivering in the middle of the narrow floor. The extreme rawness of the air proclaimed the edge of dawn. They hurried down the steep stair and entered the room, where the gas was turned full on. The regular breathing which Beatrice had noted, soft as a child's, had certainly ceased. A peace that was absolute rested in a kind of majesty on Walter Heron's face, restoring at once its beauty and its youth. Beatrice laid her hand on his heart, ran for the hand mirror to lay against his lips, then fell upon her knees sobbing. while Lotta's huddled figure expressed absolute terror. "He is dead," Beatrice said, then, after a moment, added, not knowing whence came the words, "It is better to fall into the hands of the living God than into the hands of men!"

CHAPTER V

WALTER HERON had died a perfectly natural death. The rumours which circulated through the city, and they were many, were entirely unfounded.

The dead man had shrunk, with all the shrinking of rather a fine, sensitive, highly-strung nature, from the terrible debacle of his life and hopes, but he was incapable of seeking the way out which his partner had deliberately chosen. The keenest, fullest enquiry was made, no stone left unturned, but nothing could upset the medical evidence to the effect that Heron had died in his sleep, guiltless of drugs or other aids to quick despatch, simply because his heart had been unable to stand the frightful shock and strain of events. But while this verdict had to be accepted, and no proceedings could now be taken against the firm that had brought distress on many innocent persons, the name of Heron fell from its high estate in Edinburgh circles. The affair made the usual nine days' wonder, and then was forgotten in the swift revolution of other affairs. The funeral was kept very very quiet. No one attended save the minister and the doctor, who had been his personal friends.

One mourning coach held them, following the hearse which bore all that was mortal of Walter Heron to his last rest among his kindred in a corner of the policies of Linnorie.

There was a little burying-ground there, and Beatrice had been intensely relieved to hear Compton Brodie had not been buried within its precincts. She could not have prevented it, but they had not done it. He had been buried in a Lanarkshire cemetery, at a place with which he had some connection in his youth. Afterwards she learned that he had left some sort of directions to this effect.

The little cortége moved away from "The Outlook" about one o'clock on a grey, still day. All the blinds at the neighbouring windows were decently drawn, a token of respect for which Beatrice felt a passionate touch of gratitude. Directly the coaches came to the door Beatrice flew up and put a coat over her black dress. It was not usual for women to attend funerals, but she felt she could not allow her father to go unattended out to Linnorie. She took Wally's place, that was all.

The others did not realise what she was doing till they saw her stepping into the mourning coach beside the minister and the doctor.

They stared at one another, and Lotta said in a queer, quick voice :

"What will Bee do next, Ida? She seems a little queer in the head, don't you think?"

Mr. Grier, the minister of their parish, when he saw Beatrice coated and hatted, sprang out to open the door for her.

"You think you'll go, Miss Heron?"

"I am going—it is necessary. It would—it would be very lonely for him."

Grier, a man of forty-five, struggling in a working-class parish, with small means, and a large family, was profoundly moved. He had been intending to discuss the situation with Doctor Hyslop on the way out, but this was rendered impossible by Miss Heron's presence.

Talk was necessarily spasmodic and restricted, and all were glad when the pace could be quickened as the busier streets were left behind.

The hills were looking very beautiful that soft February day; delicate mists floated here and there in the little valleys, creating the most dream-like and exquisite effects. Once or twice the sun, struggling through, revealed glimpses of unimagined glory.

They had to enter by the front gates, there being no other way of reaching the little God's acre at the far edge of the park. Beatrice was glad to find them wide open, the lodgekeeper ready with her curtsy and her sympathetic greeting. They were expected, of course.

Permission had had to be asked from Mrs. Brodie, and it was Beatrice who had written about it, Lotta having absolutely refused to do it.

At the grave Beatrice was touched inexpressibly to find a handful of old folks from Marriston village, men who had known her father in the old days, and remembered his gracious, kindly ways, men who had poignantly regretted the passing of the old name and race from Linnorie. She shook hands silently with each one, the little party decently composed themselves, and the short, touching ceremony was quickly over. Beatrice was quite unaware what a pathetic, even tragic figure she appeared that day, nor what a tremendous appeal she made to every man's heart there. She could not mourn; nay, rather she felt a sense of peace which she could not have explained.

Her father was safe, far away where none could touch him, and, further, he had rejoined her from whom his true spirit and heart had never been separated. Of that she was completely sure, and it comforted her even more than the words of the beautiful committal service which Mr. Grier spoke so reverently and with so much feeling. When all was over Beatrice stepped up to the two who had brought her.

"You won't mind if I don't ride back with you? I want to go up to the house to see Mrs. Brodie."

"And come back by train?" asked Mr. Grier, and his tone was somewhat anxious. He realised the strain that day was putting on Beatrice Heron, and understood in part, at least, what the future might demand from her.

The doctor spoke up more brusquely.

"I wouldn't do that, Miss Beatrice, you've had enough for one day. Come back with us."

But she remained firm. "It will save me coming out another day. It is necessary for me to see Mrs. Brodie."

They did not ask why, but permitted her to go reluctantly, and after they started on the return journey had much to say to one another about her splendid quality.

The future of the three women left at "The Outlook" presented a sorry enough spectacle to these two men.

"The Lord knows what will become of them," said

Grier, with a heavy sigh as the mourning coach rolled through the gates.

"And He won't tell," said the doctor without a trace of flippancy. "But that one will pull them through. The other two won't count much in the scheme of things. Of course Heron's second marriage was a mistake. She wasn't his kind nor class, and there's never been any real fusion either with him or his family."

Grier nodded his acquiescence. "She was not a lady, of course. I often wondered——"

"Nothing much to wonder at," said the doctor in the same blunt, incisive tone, as he played with the old-fashioned fob on his waistcoat. "Dangerous age, shoals in mid-sea, nobody to guide him past them. Lots of men make a mull of things about that time. Watch out, and you'll see it. It's the last flicker of expiring youth."

"Dear me, what an unpleasant idea!" remarked Mr. Grier uncomfortably. "I hope you don't apply it to all men?"

"No, no, it's temperamental! Don't worry, you won't get it," said the doctor, and his guttural laugh rolled out. "Jolly families like yours, and heavy responsibilities conscientiously tackled, kill that particular microbe. A fine woman, Beatrice Heron, a little remote and inaccessible like the North star. Hope she'll come down a bit for her own sake——"

"Ever read Tennyson, Mr. Grier?" he asked, after a brief pause. "You do? Well, that fine bit of his, 'Come down, O maid,' exactly describes her. If she finds out that love is not only of, but *in* the valley, it will be better for her. She could have married for certain, I know, a very decent chap, a friend of her brother's, called Hugh Seton. He went off to New Zealand with Wally in consequence——"

"I didn't know that, but let us hope he'll come back again."

"We can't match-make, Grier, we've got to leave these big issues on the knees of the gods. The little one will marry, and soon, she won't be too particular, either, so long as he can give her plenty of pastry."

"I suppose there won't be much left?" said Grier pitifully.

"Much! There won't be anything. It was a merciful intervention of Providence, this death of Walter Heron. It has saved the old name from being actually dragged through the dirt. I'd have been very sorry to see it."

"Then what will Beatrice do?"

"She'll show us, presently. There's more than meets the eye at the back of those deep orbs of hers. She has high ideas about retrieval. I guessed from a chance word she dropped the other night. We can have the felicity of watching a brave fight against big odds. Stand by her, Grier, you and your plucky little wife and your fine young ones. They'll keep her human. I'm only a crusty old bachelor in the background with no strings to his bow."

Grier could not let that pass. He challenged it immediately.

"I rather think that you'll do more for Miss Heron than any of us in the days that are coming."

"I'll do my bit, but it's bound to be a limited bit," was all the doctor answered. Meanwhile the object of their concern was walking slantwise across the park towards the old grey house among the trees, where already could be heard the low-breathed twitter of nesting birds. No representative of Linnorie other than one or two of the old tenants had attended the service in the churchyard, nor had Mrs. Brodie written a word of condolence. Her reply to Beatrice's request regarding the opening of the old Heron vault had been answered either by a secretary or a stranger.

Beatrice did not shrink from what easily might be an ordeal. Ordeals were to figure largely in her immediate future, and she was getting ready for them. Now that the turf had been laid above her father's quiet breast she could close down that chapter of her life and open the page on another. So her face was calm, her eyes steadfast as she crossed the last green lap of the park, and approached the familiar door. It was absolutely necessary that she should have this one interview with Mrs.

Brodie, to clear certain mists if not obstacles from her path.

When she inquired at the door for Mrs. Brodie the servant looked doubtful. She recognised Miss Heron, and was filled with curiosity tinged with sympathy, which she would not have dared to express. Beatrice, however, sensed the kindliness in the woman's accent and manner, and her eyes softened.

"Please go up," she said clearly, "and tell Mrs. Brodie that Miss Heron has remained purposely behind after the funeral, and wishes to see her on urgent business."

"Yes, Miss, will you come into the drawing-room?"

"No, thank you. It is very pleasant here. I'll take this chair."

The old hall at Linnorie, though low-roofed and oak-raftered, was spacious, covered in Indian rugs of soft yet brilliant tones, and furnished in old oak which matched that on the walls and ceiling, gave tone and cachet to the whole house. It was the only bit of it, with the exception of the library, which the Brodies had not spoiled by their ornate taste. A clear fire burned in the old highly-polished steel dog-grate, and there were flowers everywhere, hothouse blooms in pots which at once scented the air, and made it a trifle languid. Beatrice felt it warm after her rather rapid walk and was glad to undo her scarf.

She was left about ten minutes, and the brief interlude undoubtedly both rested and prepared her for what was coming. Then the servant reappeared on the stairs and asked her to come up.

It was the same room in which Mrs. Brodie had received Beatrice and her father a few days before; already it seemed centuries away.

She was standing on the hearthrug, a rather majestic figure, in a sweeping black gown, with the widow's insignia, including the cap, which she wore with distinction. There was no smile on her face, nor did she even offer her hand. She indicated a chair with a sweep of her hand, but Beatrice did not take it.

"I am sorry to intrude upon you, Mrs. Brodie," said Beatrice clearly. "But there are one or two things we

had better talk about and this will save me coming out another day."

"What are they?" asked Mrs. Brodie. "I can't conceive of them. Surely it will be better for our lawyers to settle up everything."

"What I want to say has nothing to do with law business," Beatrice said. And then somehow a little silence fell. Mrs. Brodie was a proud and hard woman, the daughter of an Edinburgh family that had just struggled into the social recognition dear to certain temperaments. The tragedy, of which she was one of the victims, was a blow to her pride, rather than to her affections. And she had continued to blame Walter Heron in her thoughts until it had become an obsession.

"Well, what is it you wish to say? I am sorry for what has happened to you, but probably it has saved us all a good deal of suffering."

"There is no doubt of that," said Beatrice, and something choked in her throat. Her appalling desolation suddenly was driven home like the edge of a sword to her most inner consciousness. Was there no love, nor help, nor understanding left on God's earth? She and Maud Brodie ought to have had a common bond of sympathy, they might have been of immense service to one another. Yet the deep sea was between, the waves as cold as ice.

"What I came to say will probably not interest you very much, Mrs. Brodie," she forced herself to say.

"That, of course, I can't say until I hear it."

"It has to do with the future. I am going to make it my business to discover our liabilities."

"What kind of liabilities?"

"The amount of money involved in the operations which brought about the disaster from which we all suffer to-day."

"Why? Far better let sleeping dogs lie."

"That is quite impossible!" said Beatrice clearly. "My father's name at least has to be cleared, and since there is no one else I will clear it and make restitution."

"How are you going to do it, unless you have a fortune up your sleeve somewhere?" said Mrs. Brodie, and her

eyes suddenly narrowed. The fact that she was absolutely safeguarded by certain provisions Brodie had made some years back did not make her grateful, but merely suspicious of the ulterior motives and facts lying behind what appeared to her an extraordinary proposal.

"Fortune!" Beatrice faintly, very faintly smiled. "We are absolutely penniless, Mrs. Brodie, we don't even know whether we are entitled to another meal. But I can work, thank God, and I will work for the end I have mentioned."

"You're quite mad, my dear. Far better let the dead past bury its dead, and forge ahead for yourself. A rich marriage for you and your sister, that is the only thing that will save the situation."

Beatrice suffered that to pass.

"I came to ask whether you had any idea or knowledge of the people most affected by the trust money, that was—that was—swallowed up in speculation?"

Mrs. Brodie shook her head.

"I thought you said what you had to say had nothing to do with legal affairs. I can't discuss the matter with you. I have no knowledge and less interest. Your attitude is an impossible one. We, a handful of innocent women, can't be held responsible for the mistakes, the sins of omission and commission of others. So far as I and my family are concerned, we shall make a clean sweep of it all, and leave Edinburgh."

"You will leave Linnorie, then?" said Beatrice, conscious of a sudden and most acute relief.

"Of course, as soon as ever we can."

"And what will become of all this?"

"It will be sold, I expect. I have never liked the place."

"It was not to be expected that you would," said Beatrice, driven by some impulse she could not control.

"Why do you say that?" asked Mrs. Brodie, contracting her brows.

"Well, because it is not the kind of place you would like," murmured Beatrice lamely.

"I don't care for Scotland at all, and for Edinburgh less than most places. My mother was an English-

woman, and so I suppose you would not call me thoroughbred. Monica and I are going down south immediately and probably we shall not return. We are leaving on Monday."

"Are you going to sell the house and its contents?" asked Beatrice, for there were some heirlooms there, which had belonged to the Herons, and which ought not to be removed from their proper niche.

"I may and I may not. Everything will depend—but these are matters for the lawyers to settle. They have a tangled skein to unwind, Miss Heron. Have *you* any plans for the future?"

"Yes," answered Beatrice steadily, "I have some."

Suddenly, and without waiting for further elucidation, Mrs. Brodie diverted the talk into a new channel.

"I have had a cable from my son to do nothing until he returns."

"Where is he?" asked Beatrice with no particular interest, remembering, indeed, for the first time, that there was a young Brodie, engaged in some kind of service in the east.

"He has got leave and is coming very soon. Where is he? Oh, in Singapore at the moment, interested in big things there—Scotland was not big enough to hold him."

"You cabled the news to him, then?"

"We did, but he does not know yet the tragic circumstances, and he left before a letter could reach him."

Across the void and the waste of waters Beatrice Heron wafted a message of sympathy and fellow-feeling to Compton Brodie's son, though why she could not have told. The wind of the spirit which bloweth where it listeth leads us sometimes into pastures new, where there are green and lovely things, and rest. But sometimes we can be wafted by the same wind to arid desert which can be made to blossom like the rose.

Beatrice rose suddenly from her chair, aware that the interview had ended.

"Won't you wait and have some tea?" asked Mrs. Brodie, but her tone lacked warmth.

"No, thank you. I will walk down to the village and

get some at the inn. Mrs. Meldrum is an old friend of mine."

"They are all old friends of yours it would seem, Miss Heron. You left Linnorie, but you took the best with you. They have never regarded us as anything but interlopers here, an ungrateful, ungracious crew they are—I shall be glad to turn my back on them, and to let them know that I am glad."

All the jealousy, the strong resentment which a small and selfish nature can muster breathed through these self-revealing words. She had not intended to speak them; once past the portals of her lips, however, they could neither be explained, mitigated nor withdrawn.

"I am sorry you have found them that, Mrs. Brodie, faithfulness and loyalty are precious. Don't grudge the poor Herons a little of memory's sweetness. It is all they have left."

She went out with that, from an interview which from no point of view could be called successful or satisfactory. She had learned naught of what she wished to learn, but two salient points stood out. Evidently Mrs. Brodie had been left well provided for, and the son and heir and representative of the dead man was on his way home.

These two facts might alter, or at least colour, her own scheme of things. She had a curious feeling at the back of her mind that they would.

CHAPTER VI

THE village of Marriston was quite close to Linnorie. One of Mrs. Brodie's grievances against the place was that the old gateway opened on the village street. It was a long, straggling street, typically Scotch in design and architecture, if it could be said to possess either. There was no attempt at regularity or picturesque effect in grouping the houses, nevertheless something characteristic and arresting had been achieved. Its proximity to the gates of the "big hoose" was reminiscent of the old days when village folk looked to the Lairds for protection, even at the point of the sword.

The Herons had been associated with the life of Marriston for so many generations that the village had not taken kindly to the new rule. Beatrice, therefore, had a sense of nearness and familiarity almost amounting to comfort as she stepped through the lodge gates, and turned in the falling dusk down the village street.

She knew that though circumstances, never fully explained but certainly sinister, had turned them out of the old home which was the cradle of their race, that they were beloved, and never would be forgotten by the people.

The village inn, which had neither name nor sign post, stood only about a hundred yards from the gates. It was a whitewashed two-storied building, with faded green facings to the door and windows, and stood far enough back from the roadway to give suggestion of a small courtyard.

An old draw well in the middle of the space added to the illusion, its mouth firmly boarded down, while a wooden seat was erected round the old post, to which the buckets had been attached. A new water supply, drawn from the pure sources of the Pentland hills, had

been one of the new laird's only partly appreciated benefactions to the village. The landlady, Mrs. Meldrum, a very stout, jovial-looking person, saw Miss Heron leave the Linnorie gates, because she had missed no incident of that eventful day, and was waiting to receive her.

"Come awa' in, Miss Beatrice," she said kindly and with a quick starting tear as her warm hand enfolded the slim, cold fingers of her who was now the chief hope of the stricken family. "I've been watching for ye. Your tea's ready. I kent ye wouldna be takin' tea up there. It's just twenty minutes since the coaches gaed by."

Beatrice did not dream of resenting this kindly espionage, knowing full well it was the very warp and woof of village life.

"Thank you, Mrs. Meldrum, I could have had tea with Mrs. Brodie, but I excused myself because I wanted to see you."

"Fine I kent," said Mrs. Meldrum, and led the way into her own little living-room at the back, where a fair linen cloth was spread on the table and the white-and-gold china, used only on high days and holidays, set out on the tray. Scones and oatcakes and rolls of pure golden fresh butter, home-made jam and a kebbuck of cheese, all proclaimed their welcome, while a china hen proudly surveyed the scene from the middle, suggesting the possibility of new laid eggs.

"They're in the pan, Miss Beatrice," said Mrs. Meldrum coaxingly. "Laid this very morning, too. I'm deid sure it's very little denner—I mean lunch—if ony, you've eaten the day. So come awa' ben, an' mak' a good tea." Beatrice smiled, and at sight of the food became conscious of the physical weakness which supervenes on a long fast.

She dropped into a chair, feeling the comfort of being able to relax while she accepted this cup of cold water from a kindly hand. Sudden delicious tears filled in her eyes, and Mrs. Meldrum's were not dry.

"Wheesht, wheesht, lammie," she said, wiping her eyes as she ran out to bring in the teapot.

"You'll have tea with me, Mrs. Meldrum, or I don't eat a bite," said Beatrice firmly.

"Well, if that's the set o'd I'll get anither cup," said Mrs. Meldrum, smiling happily. "No a crater will come in here, lammie, for I've gien my orders, and efter you've had your tea Ellick Finlay will drive ye in the gig to Marriston Junction to get the five o'clock, and ye'll be in Edinburgh in a jiffy. It doesna' stop till it gets to Waverley. Maybe ye mind the five o'clock? It was your father that got it to stop at Marriston, and mony a body has been gled o't."

Beatrice nodded, and began to eat with a relish which surprised herself. "Mrs. Meldrum, there is no good food in towns," she said with a queer twist of her lips. "Everything is mixed, adulterated, sometimes poisoned. Everything that is real and dear is in the lap of the hills!"

Mrs. Meldrum sipped her tea and then, leaning her elbows on the table, looked across at her honoured guest.

"Miss Beatrice, it's a' lees what they're sayin' I ken, and it's no Marriston folk that says it, but the ootlins frae the big hoose an' the folk they pey. We that ken the auld laird shut their mooths as weel as we can, but it's an ill world."

Beatrice accepted the challenge and invitation, and after she had eaten a bit of scone and delicious butter, she met Mrs. Meldrum's gaze squarely.

"I'll tell you everything. It's what I've come for, that is, partly—the other part was to be warmed and fed, and you're doing that. My father had nothing to do with the embezzling of the trust funds, the only blame that could be laid to him was that he ought to have made himself aware of what his partner was doing, and prevented it."

"Just what I said. Them that kent the auld laird a' say the same. An' ist true whit they say too, that if he'd been spared they hae ta'en him up and maybe"—here her voice sunk to an awe-stricken whisper—"maybe gaoled him?"

Beatrice nodded. "It is what would have happened, and he would perhaps not have been able to clear himself in the eyes of the law, so it is better."

"Guid sakes, so it is! The Lord undertook for him. Blessed be His name!"

More genuine thankfulness than was expressed in Mrs. Meldrum's voice could not have been found, even in the heart of Beatrice herself.

"An' what happens to ye now, lammie, an' to Miss Easybell, an'—an' the mistress?" Mrs. Meldrum hesitated on the last name, because the old laird's marriage to a woman of no importance, one who had worked for her living in an office, was a sore bit in Marriston.

"We shall have to work for our living, all of us, there is nothing else to be done."

"Guid sakes, an' God help ye, but you'll win through! He'll open up the way. Ye come o' godly folk, and whit ist Dauvit says: 'I've never seen the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging bread——'"

"I have a bigger task than getting my living, Mrs. Meldrum," said Beatrice finding an enormous comfort in voicing her inward resolve to this understanding, sympathetic ear. "I'm going to dedicate my life to getting back the money, making it somehow, and restoring it to those who have suffered, at least to those who need it most, the elderly ladies and widows and spinsters who trusted the firm because the name of Heron was in it."

"Guid sakes, but ye'll do it! It's in the auld stock; you'll do it, my dear! God help an bless ye. I dinna ken hoo, but that ye'll do it, there's naethin surer."

Beatrice's eyes glowed. She was grateful that there was no questioning into details, for these as yet were not arranged in her own mind.

Suddenly Mrs. Meldrum put a leading question:

"Whit's gaunna happen up by? Will *they* bide in Linnorie?"

Beatrice shook her head.

"I hope they're to be hard up too! I'd like them to be," said Mrs. Meldrum, with quite a vicious snap in her voice; "It would be for their guid."

"As to that, I don't know; Mrs. Brodie said to-day they are leaving very soon. She has never liked Linnorie."

"Hoo could she?" inquired Mrs. Meldrum in high scorn. "She doesna belong, she widna belong if she bade in Linnorie for a thoosand years."

It was a complete and accurate summing-up of Mrs. Brodie's relation to the old home of the Herons. Beatrice made no comment on it, but proceeded: "They are waiting for the return of the eldest son."

"Oh, is he comin' back; he's the only wan that coonts in that family, Miss Beatrice. If they had a' been like Maister John——"

Beatrice was not in the least interested in John Brodie, whom she had never seen, nor yet wished to see; the very name of Brodie in a sense stank in her nostrils. From her father's association with Compton Brodie had dated the heaviest of their misfortunes.

"Well, I don't know what happens to Linnorie. I suppose other strangers will get it, but so long as you are here, Mrs. Meldrum, there will be a bit of a home for me in Marriston."

"Ay, will there, my lammie; well, before I tell Ellick Finlay to get the gig yokit, promise me wan thing."

"What is that?"

"That you'll make this your home. Whatever ye may hae to do in the wey of work you'll need a bit holiday and a rest noo an' again. Tak' it here. I'll set a wee bit room ready for ye up there near the stars and keep the door lockit, and the bed weel-aired and naebody shall ever set fit in it but yoursel. Is that a bargain?"

Beatrice could not speak. She quickly wound her scarf about her shoulders and stepping forward flung her arms about the neck of her faithful friend and for a moment their tears were intermingled.

Her last word as she climbed to the high gig and sat down beside Alec Finlay was a promise to come back to Marriston at the earliest opportunity. She reached Edinburgh about six o'clock in the clear beautiful evening light which showed the city at her best. Stars were already twinkling in the wide expanse of blue, and the air was mild with a touch of the real spring which February so often timidly offers, not sure whether her blustering successor will make short work of her modest advances. Beatrice had neither desire nor intention of going home immediately; in thought and spirit she felt oddly detached from the two who were doubtless waiting

eagerly for her return in the little house on the ridge overlooking the sea.

Isabella had apparently ranged herself on their step-mother's side, and sharing her grievances, and ready to pick a quarrel with any one who would serve as a scape-goat. Beatrice was by no means through with her sister yet, a long intimate talk was imminent which she hoped would end in the provision of some common aim and purpose.

She must marshal her forces first, and be able to present some ordered plan of campaign to critics who would be both difficult to convince and to enlist in her cause.

She crossed the street rapidly from the Waverley Steps on which the newsboys were bawling their wares with the usual persistence.

Beatrice would always be glad that she had not been on the streets on the night of the Linnorie tragedy.

Arrived on the other side of the wide, beautiful thoroughfare she sped up St. Andrew Street, crossed the Square in a slanting direction and walked rapidly along George Street. The shops were nearly all closed, but reaching a certain door she glanced up and saw that there were still lights in the upper windows.

A high narrow door was wedged between the plate glass of two large shops ; slantwise on the lintel, placed so that it was not hidden in the daytime, a brass plate announced the name of Madame Theodore, costumier. She had no windows on the pavement and her salons were on the first floor, the most exclusive in Edinburgh, visited only by those who had individual taste and long purses. She was an old friend of the Heron family, and had made the trousseau of the first Mrs. Heron. Of late years they had not been able to give her any orders, her style and her price would not have suited the second Mrs. Heron, and for the girls of course her prices were out of the question. But Beatrice had never allowed the queer friendship to drop and had continued to call occasionally on Madame Theodore, whose real name was Theodora Duncan, born in the Stockbridge of Edinburgh, and knowing no French excepting what she had picked up on her bi-yearly visits to Paris and other centres of fashion.

Beatrice's ring was immediately answered, the street door opened as if by magic, and she ascended the steep stairs quickly to find Madame Theodore waiting at the first door on the landing.

"I'm glad to see you, Miss Heron," she said, her kind old face alight with warmth and sympathy, while her keen, black eyes softened and her whole air was one of extreme friendliness. "I thought you'd come. I didn't write, for what's the use? There aren't words enough to let folk pick the right ones when things like that happen."

Beatrice nodded, returning the clasp of the kind hand, then stepped in behind Madame Theodore, the door was shut and they walked into the little salon covered in soft French grey carpet with white walls faintly outlined with pink.

"They've only just all gone," said Madame Theodore. "Sit down, my dear. Do you want anything to eat—a cup of tea maybe? If you do, we'll go upstairs; they'll be getting mine ready."

Madame Theodore lived above her business premises in a fine roomy suite, commanding a splendid view from the back windows. Beatrice was not very familiar with it, though she had been up there once or twice. She often came of an evening to have a chat with Madame Theodore, knowing the moment when she would be likely to find her free. She explained where she had been, and that she needed nothing, only to talk.

"I want to ask your advice, Madame," said Beatrice frankly.

"Advice is very cheap, my dear, but any I have to give, you're welcome to," said Madame with her shrewd smile. She was a fine figure of a woman yet, and her simple gown of dull black satin, exquisitely cut, did it full justice. She was nearer seventy than sixty, but had managed to preserve her looks without any aid from art excepting her well-cut clothes.

"This is a terrible business for you all. I've been thinking such a lot about you, and if you hadn't come to-morrow say, I'd have been writing. I saw from the papers that Mr. Heron was to be buried to-day. I was so glad it was at Linnorie."

Beatrice nodded.

"It could not have been anywhere else."

"I suppose it means—it must mean trouble for you in the future, hard times, harder even than you've had?" said the business woman in her straight direct way. She was very skilled at handling human beings, having been "in the public," as she expressed it, for nearly forty years. She had begun as an errand girl in the establishment she had owned and governed for nearly thirty years. She saw that the only balm Beatrice Heron needed was work, a definite purpose, something to look forward to. And she was prepared to help her to the uttermost, how fully prepared the astonished girl was about to learn.

"We are absolutely penniless, Madame; soon we may have no bread to eat. We aren't even sure whether they can't come and sell us up and turn us out?"

"Who are *they*?"

Beatrice winced at the leading question.

"The authorities, if they hold us, or at least my father's estate, liable, and it is right that they should——"

"It's a serious business—then you'll all have to work?"

Beatrice nodded.

"I'm not concerned very much about my stepmother. She will find a way out for herself. Ida seems to be standing by her just now, but we haven't really discussed anything seriously. I must find something to do which will not merely provide a living wage, but offer some prospect of making money. I will clear my father's name, and repay the money, Madame. I have vowed and pledged myself to it."

Madame continued to regard the girl intently, her keen, black eyes, her firm yet mobile mouth betraying naught of her inward emotion. She was deeply moved, but the Scotch do not readily show their emotion, nay, they are often, though without cause, ashamed of it.

"It sounds an uncommon big order," she said laconically. "But bigger things have been done in the world than that by folk not half as well fitted for them as you. Tell me what you've got in your mind?"

"It's what I've come for, Madame. You have some-

times complimented me on my taste in dress and other things."

"It's more than a taste, it's an artistic sense, the one thing needful in a business like mine. And it has aye been a grief to me that you hadn't the chance of being dressed as you should be. Fine would I have liked to dress you as I used to dress your mother. She had the sense too. She knew how to wear a feather or a ribbon as if it belonged. I mind once telling her she could drape a bath towel round her shoulders and make other women green with envy."

Beatrice smiled, though a little wintrily, at that reminiscent tribute, but immediately continued the cross-examination.

"Well, if I do possess that quality, and it is as valuable as you say, has it any market value? Would there be a chance, even remote, of my making any money out of it?"

CHAPTER VII

THE clever old business woman, with her white artistic hands folded on the satin of her gown against which both their shape and whiteness showed up well, regarded her questioner musingly for a minute, seeking by her words not to overwhelm Beatrice by unexpected or inflated hopes and visions.

"There is money in my business, Miss Beatrice, of course ; you have understood that ? "

"You look prosperous," said Beatrice, smiling again as she looked round the pretty pink and grey salon, "but of course, I've no idea of what could be made."

"There is no limit to it," said Madame, "so long as women's vanity and purses last out. I have charged high prices all my life. I don't deny it, because I cater for them that want individual clothes, and are willing to pay for them ; but I have never profiteered nor given poor value. 'The best' has been my watchword. It isn't a bad one, Miss Heron, whatever the walk in life. The cream aye comes to the top. Well, as I was saying"—she added with a homely touch reminiscent of early Stockbridge days—"there is practically no limit to what can be made. If I could have been bothered with partners, and had cared to extend my business, of course I would have gone further. I've a waiting list of customers now ; I only take the number I can do justice to. But I can't be bothered with strange folk ; the moment you begin letting them meddle with your affairs you're done, or at least your troubles begin. This has aye been a single-handed business, and though I've had splendid helpers, treating them generously and picking them wisely, it's a one-woman show, d'ye follow me ? "

Beatrice replied that she did. She was so deeply

interested that she was sitting forward, her eager eyes fixed on Madame Theodore's handsome old face.

"It's queer you should come the day, or that this should have happened, for I'm thinking of retiring. I was just casting about in my mind what to do about it, very loath somehow to put the thing into the usual hands, and sell the good-will for what it'll bring."

"Oh!" said Beatrice with a quick breath, "I hope you won't retire just yet; I was hoping——"

"What were you hoping, my dear? If you'll tell me frankly, it will be better and we'll get quicker to where we want to get."

"Well, I had a sort of idea that you might be willing to take me on as an apprentice, to learn the business thoroughly."

"So I would be, and glad to get you. Your kind doesn't knock at business doors every day. You'd be worth two or three hundred a year in my place."

"Would I?" asked Beatrice, and her eyes grew round with wonder; "but how? I'm very ignorant."

"Of sordid details which any hewer of wood or drawer of water can get at her finger ends! You've got the sense, the soul, what the French call the *flair*. You'd prevent other women from making guys of themselves, and that's what they're willing to pay for. But, my dear, it would be a step down, you know. In Edinburgh a business woman, well, she's a business woman, and you a Heron of Linnorie."

Beatrice put up a deprecating hand.

"I'm nobody now, Madame, and the old name is in the dust. Please God it won't stay there, not if I can lift it up again. Forget my name if it will help you to understand exactly how I feel and stand."

Madame Theodore nodded. "You could take another one easily——"

But Beatrice shook quite an emphatic head.

"I would not. If the time ever came when I could put my name on a plate like yours I would be proud to see it there. You respect honest work, Madame Theodore. It has made you what you are. Why should I change my name?"

"Me respect work! Well of course I do. I think it's the only thing that really counts in the world, in the long run. Fact is, Miss Heron, it's the Lord's best gift to folk, only they don't ay see it. But we're getting away from the point, which is your future. You would be willing to come in here as a learner, you say?"

"It is what I've been hoping for."

"There would be drawbacks; the folk you'd have to work beside for instance; some of them are very nice, but my head woman, Maggie Turnbull, she's been here nine years, clever but bad-tempered, very bad-tempered—I've to keep outen her way mostly. I only just manage to see that she doesn't put upon the rest of them. She's the head of the work-room."

"A great artist?" put in Beatrice eagerly.

Madame shook her head.

"Not that; a good, steady, reliable hewer of wood. She can do what she is told, and she has enough horse sense to learn that the minute she moves a hair's-breadth away from her instructions she gets wrong. I've taught her that. She's a grand stayer, but outside of her work I can't honestly say I've much use for Mag Turnbull."

"Would she—would she resent my coming in?"

"If she kent what was at the back of it she might, even although she knows perfectly well she could no more hold this business together than a pin can hold up the folds of a velvet frock. The ladies just wouldn't stand her, her very face would frighten them."

"And I would be under her?"

"Absolutely necessary, Miss Heron. She knows all there is to know about the way to carry on a work-room. She's an invaluable servant, and she knows her value."

"I'd not be afraid of her—I think, if she is a sincere person."

"Oh, she's that, and for frankness, well that's distressing if you like. Whenever she opens her mouth she puts her foot in it as the saying goes. But you wouldn't need to be more than six or nine months up there, your true job would be down here in the show-room, but

before you could tackle this part of the business you would need to take a spell at the drudgery."

"That is necessary everywhere, Madame Theodore; it is what is the matter with so many of our domestic helps; nobody has ever taken any trouble to teach them the elements of their business."

Madame Theodore nodded.

"We need apprenticeship to domestic science, same as to dressmaking or millinery or any other thing. Did you trim that hat, by the by?"

"I put the dull ribbon on it," answered Beatrice, flushing slightly.

"I thought so. Well, it's just right. I couldn't have done it better myself. You won't need to learn the millinery part of the show. That's born in you. I see light, Miss Beatrice, and I think you'll do."

"Then you'll allow me to come?" said Beatrice, flushing still more deeply, this time with relief and pleasure, not apprehension.

"Oh, yes. Could you come to-morrow? The sooner the better, in case you change your mind."

Beatrice was startled by the suddenness of the proposal, but reversed Madame Theodore's suggestion of mind changing.

"I hadn't thought of anything so rapid, but yes, of course, I'll come to-morrow. When does business begin?"

"Nine, but don't you come till ten, for I'll need to have a talk with Mag Turnbull first. Then that's settled."

A momentary pause ensued, then Madame Theodore sat forward suddenly with an odd expression on her face.

"I hardly ever thought my chance would come, Miss Beatrice. It's just wonderful how things wheel round, isn't it?"

"How do you mean? What chance are you talking about?"

"The debt I owe to the Herons, and my chance to pay it off."

"If you would like to tell me what that is, Madame

Theodore, it might help me. I had no idea that you owed anything to us, indeed, I'm sure you can't possibly owe much."

"Ah! but I do! It goes back thirty years, before ever you was born, when your mother came, the bonniest bride and the sweetest that Linnorie ever saw. She was a Miss Elder of Brankonhall, you know that, I suppose?"

"Yes, of course."

"She came here, and her mother before her, for everything she wore, no, not to me, of course, but to my predecessor, Madame Destin."

"I've heard of her, a wonderful French artist, wasn't she?"

"She was, but she had the de'il's own temper, Miss Heron, and no principles whatever. She believed in neither God nor man, and acted accordingly. She was a foreigner, out-and-out. Some of her folk had drifted this way with the Huguenot refugees, and some are buried out about Penicuik or thereabouts, that was why she was interested in your mother's marriage.

"I was a skirt hand then upstairs, and I hadn't a penny to my name, nor a friend to help me. I fitted out most of your mother's wedding things, Destin standing putting the fear of death on me. What I suffered at her hands I couldn't tell. She was as a fiend incarnate, and she had me under her thumb, made me sign an agreement to serve her for so many years at a certain wage. I had nobody to advise me and I was too glad to get into this splendid business, so I signed it. She's dead, poor thing, and naebody kens where that kind will go, but she robbed me of hundreds of good pounds I might have earned elsewhere!"

"Dear me, what a strange story! exclaimed Beatrice, deeply interested. "And my mother——"

"I'm coming to that. Your mother liked me, and though she was the quietest spoken lady I've ever met in my life, her eyes were wide open, she was terrible kind to me, she made it a joy to wait on her by the very way she spoke and looked at you, so grateful, so appreciative—oh, I tell you, Miss Beatrice, you sample all kinds here,

some of them you want to set up on the heavenly heights, only they get there without any help from you, while others you've no use for, and would like to put down in the depths of the deep sea."

Launched on her own business and theme, a certain rugged eloquence about Madame Theodore could hold a listener spellbound. Beatrice was thus held. For a brief instant she was made to forget her own troubles and problems in the experience of another.

"Your mother lived on the heavenly heights all her days, and she's there now, where she belongs. She showed me all kinds of sweet kindness. She invited me out to Linnorie for my holidays. My, but I love that place, and it was salt tears I shed when you had to leave it. What was the true inwardness of that, Miss Beatrice? Was you robbed of it by that man that killed himself, Compton Brodie?"

Beatrice hesitated. "It is too strong a word, Madame Theodore, and Mr. Brodie is dead. It will be better if we leave his memory alone. All I will say is that my father's association with him was not happy, and that it ended in disaster."

"Imphm. I thought as much. Up here, looking north and south, we see a good deal, and in the constant coming and going to the show-rooms, lots of things besides handkerchiefs and veils and bags are dropped. Linnorie, I will never forget! I see it in my dreams. I go out sometimes and wander round it—I'll be going very soon to lay a wee bunch of flowers on your father's grave, and I just want to say that I thank God you've laid him out there among his own folk. I was afraid that woman would prevent it."

"Have you done any work for Mrs. Brodie?"

Madame Theodore pursed up her lips and shook her head.

"I have not. She's been here more than once, but I just speak to her about the waiting list. I didn't tell her, though I would like to have done, that I'd never stoop to make a gown or trim a hat for her, not me! I'm not needing her custom, nor would I take it, even if I did."

Beatrice did not know what to say. She had always known that she had a friend in the fashionable dress-maker, but had not until now, the slightest idea of the depth and sincerity of her devotion to the name of Heron.

"Tell me about my mother—it helps me, Madame Theodore."

"It helps me, too, for her kind is getting scarcer nowadays. Edinburgh quality is changing. She treated me as if I was an honoured guest at Linnorie, and when I was there, her and me used to speak about the days when I would have made a fortune in the business after I got it in my own name. She ay said I would make that fortune."

"And have you?"

Madame Theodore nodded. "And we planned that I was to get that wee house at the far side of the park, where the two Miss Pedens lived. They were two of your mother's lost lambs, Miss Beatrice. They lost all their wee bit in a bank smash. She just took them there and planted them, your father pretending that he had retrieved some of their money, and they lived to the day of their death without ever guessing that it was a fairy tale."

Beatrice's eyes filled with happy, healing tears. Ah, but these old memories were sweet, and she was grateful to her kind friend for dwelling on them, because they provided balm for a bitter consciousness that through the name of Heron suffering had come to innocent people.

"It was a bad day's work for your father when your mother died," pursued Madame Theodore. "And it's not always easy to follow the Lord's dealing or to understand it. Your father ought to have been a country laird, and nothing else, with the right folk to handle his rents and things. He lacked the money sense."

"But he was a distinguished lawyer," cried Beatrice jealously.

A little smile hovered like a fleeting shadow across the dressmaker's strong, mobile mouth.

"That's true, too, but he had not the money-getting

sense which they say is seldom left out of a lawyer's constitution. But you'll let me finish my story. Your mother and me had it all arranged that when I made my fortune I was to get what they called the 'Wee Heronry,' and spend the evening of my days there, and her at the big house, and you and Miss Isabel married and bringing your little bairns about Linnorie. Oh, we had it all cut and dry, and here we are the day, me havoring like an old woman, and you, my bonnie dear, the last leaf on the tree!"

"Not quite—you've forgotten Wally and Isabella."

"You're the only leaf that counts, or that is likely to save the tree," said Madame Theodore steadily. "So, you see, the debt I owe to Linnorie can never be discharged. When Madame Destin died your mother was determined I should succeed to the business—she said I had held it together, for old Frenchie grew perfectly impossible as she got older, and folks were feared at her. She went to France on a wild-goose chase after some of her own folks and died there, and it was your father and mother that established me here, finding the money and helping me in every possible way, bringing me custom, their own and other folks', so, you see, you see how big is the debt, and that whatever I could do for you, and that cannot be so very much, would be just a fleabite against the bit things I've been telling you about."

"It is very good of you to tell me, you've no idea how it has helped me," said Beatrice, and her eyes were glowing. "So long as I have two friends in the world like you and Mrs. Meldrum, how can I be poor?"

"Did you see Mrs. Meldrum the day then? She and I are great pals. I stop the night there when I want a day or two in the country."

"I went there to tea after I had been up at Linnorie."

"You saw Mrs. Brodie to-day, then? Don't answer unless you want to, Miss Beatrice. I haven't the right to pry into your affairs."

"Oh yes, you have, the right that loving-kindness confers. I saw Mrs. Brodie, but we shall never be friends."

"How could you, there is no bit of common ground handy for you to meet on?" observed the dressmaker shrewdly.

"She blames my father for the tragedy, and I blame Mr. Brodie, so, you see, between us there is a great gulf fixed. She spoke of leaving Linnorie."

"A good thing, too—oh, Miss Beatrice!"

"Yes, Madame Theodore."

"I'm seeing things, dreaming dreams of the days to come. My mother had the second sight, and whiles I have just a glint of it—you'll be back in Linnorie yet, there's nothing surer."

"I'd like to think that, but I don't just see at the moment how it's going to be accomplished. But meantime, I'm going to begin to-morrow morning at ten o'clock—the great adventure!"

"Yes, my dear, and there's one big factor in life you'll never get away from, however hard you try."

"What is that?" asked Beatrice as she rose mightily comforted, and began to pull on her gloves again.

"Heaven helps them that help themselves. Your mother often said it to me in this very room. It was green and yellow in Madame Destin's time. This pink and grey was your mother's choosing, it was soft and restful, like herself. I've never changed it, only had it renewed."

Beatrice looked round tenderly, and had suddenly the same sense of nearness to her mother that had come on the night of the tragedy when she was ministering to her father in the den at "The Outlook."

"I have such a comforted feeling, Madame Theodore," she said simply, all her pride of race and of honour and of high resolve melted into simple human need. "I have the feeling that God has led me here. You are a precious friend. May He help me to reward you!"

"Reward! Them that works for rewards dinna get them," said the plain Scotchwoman, and her keen eyes suddenly overflowed.

Beatrice put her arm round her shoulders and kissed her cheek. "I'll never forget, never!" she said solemnly,

“and whatever the future may hold of goodness or happiness, it is you who will have brought it to me.”

She went with that, and when she reached the street and uplifted her eyes to the clear sky, it was to see the star of promise riding high, offering to her troubled heart its message of hope and glory.

CHAPTER VIII

"I WISH I knew what has happened to Bee," said Ida in a weary, discontented voice. "It's nearly half-past seven. A whole hour to wait for supper even. Hasn't it been a horrid day?"

Mrs. Heron nodded her assent as she replied, "Bee seldom thinks of anyone but herself. There was no need at all for her to go out to Marriston to-day. I think myself it was a bit of a pose."

Ida did not refute this, but sat forward to draw the fire together, and add a bit of fresh coal.

"She may have gone up to Linnorie, you never know with Bee. She always does the thing you least expect. I thought I heard the gate, didn't you?"

Lotta nodded, and just then the bell rang.

"Are we seeing anybody?" asked Ida excitedly. "Bee wouldn't ring the bell."

"I don't know—it depends."

As Lotta spoke these words Lizzie Anderson opened the door.

"That's Mr. Grier asking to see ye," she said.

Lotta made a wry face. She had very little use for the clergyman of whom her husband had been very fond.

"It's no the minister," remarked Lizzie, quick enough to translate her mistress's grimace. "It's the ither Mr. Grier."

"Oh, Jimmy!" cried Ida, brightening obviously. "Yes, let him come in."

Lizzie stepped back, and in another half-minute ushered in a tall, dark-haired young man with an earnest, studious face, and a somewhat diffident air. He was the minister's younger brother, studying medicine at Glasgow University, and who, frequently visiting at the Manse, had become acquainted with the Herons. That he admired

Ida was common knowledge in both families, but in Lotta's eyes at least, a penniless student who had to tutor in the evenings to help to pay for his classes was out of the running as a matrimonial prize. Poor Lotta knew nothing of the secret and inner web of her country's glory, and would have opened her casual eyes wide had she been informed that some of its most vivid and brilliant threads have been woven in the attic of the penniless student, who could endure hunger of the body, but not of the soul.

She did not regard Jimmy Grier with disfavour, however, as she rose to shake hands with him; he provided a welcome break on the unendurable monotony of a long, sad evening.

"How do you do, where did you spring from?" she asked.

"I came through for the week-end on the five o'clock train. Donald thought I might come along to see you. I'm very sorry for you all. How are you, Miss Ida?"

"Just managing to exist," she answered, and a subtle change had crept over the girl, the kind of change to be observed in a certain type whenever a member of the opposite sex appears on the scene. Isabel Heron was a born huntress and coquette, she could no more have helped her little air of self-consciousness at sight of Jimmy Grier than she could have helped breathing. It was just part of her, and meant nothing, whereas he, poor boy, fathoms deep in love, wove his dreams of its frail web.

"Surely you are being extravagant," said Ida demurely. "It isn't long since you were here for a week-end."

"Six weeks, and I wasn't due for another six I suppose, but when Donald wrote me what had happened I felt I must come. How is Miss Heron?"

"Quite well. She went out to Marriston, to the funeral," said Mrs. Heron. "We were just talking about her when you rang the bell."

"Well, how's Glasgow, as smoky and delightful as ever?"

"Just about the same, we've had less rain than usual lately, but I've been too busy to notice anything much.

You see, I go up for the first part of the Final in about two months, and it's going to be a pretty hard pull."

"Oh, you'll get through," said Ida confidently. "You always do. You've never been known to fail in an exam, have you?"

"I can't afford to fail, Miss Ida, that's the long and short of it," said Grier with a laugh which sounded very merry and boyish, and took the seriousness from his face. It was a very good-looking face, but poor Jimmy wanted good feeding, well-cut clothes, the atmosphere of the successful man to bring out all his undoubted physical gifts. His day was coming, there was resolution, steady purpose, invincible hope informing his seriousness. The stars in their courses had decreed that Jimmy would make good. The only question was whether he would make good in time to give him his heart's desire—the love of Isabel Heron—who was not and never would be, good enough for him. The Griers had been fatherless boys, and their mother, with that deep-seated selfless ambition which has made motherhood divine, had dedicated them both to the professions, working early and late, half starving herself, thinking of nothing but the one shining goal.

She had lived to see her elder son an honoured and successful minister of the Gospel, and the younger on the fair way to achieve distinction in medicine. And then, like Simeon, she had departed in peace, to reap her great reward. But she had left no money behind, and Donald had helped his young brother out of his own modest means, being incited thereto by a wife who understood and appreciated what sacrifices had been made by the woman who had blessed her with her dying breath for having made her son happy and given him the kind of home a man needs who has odds to fight against.

The Manse was Jimmy Grier's only home, and his brother's wife his guide, philosopher and friend, whenever he needed feminine advice.

She disapproved of Isabel Heron, and her one regret was that the brother she was so fond of had not fixed his heart on Beatrice, who was Alison Grier's ideal of womanhood.

"Oh, but you won't fail!" said Ida confidently. "And after you've passed and can flaunt all your gold medals and things at us, what happens?"

"Well, I've got my way to carve out. I've got it cut-and-dried though, Miss Ida. Yesterday I had a bit of splendid luck. Professor Bannatyne asked me to come in as his assistant directly I get through."

"Where?"

"At the hospital. It's a ripping chance, I tell you. I'm fearfully bucked about it. There are scores after that job. And he asked me himself, isn't it top hole?"

"Much money in it?" asked Lotta critically.

"Oh, no money at all. You get your living, board and lodging I mean, but for practice and experience, the chance of seeing things and learning, it can't be beat."

"Then it will really only be a continuation of your education, and not the beginning of your career."

"It's all part of it, and you never know what may come out of an appointment of that kind. Everything depends on how a chap gets on, you know, with his chief."

His eyes glowed with the inner enthusiasm of his soul. It was easy to see that his life-work was his passion, and that he would bring to every branch of it the enthusiasm of the devotee.

"Then I suppose you'll get a practice," said Ida musingly. "But it'll be years and years, won't it, before you're a proper success like old Wingate. Just rolling in money he is, and nobody to spend it on."

"He might take me as an assistant and successor—I've thought of that," said Jimmy. "I'm going to suggest it, but I haven't the face to do it till the lists come out at midsummer."

"If only money weren't so unequally distributed," said Mrs. Heron discontentedly. "None of the people who could really spend money properly seem to have it."

"I hope—I hope—that hard times aren't coming to you," said Jimmy, blurting out concern on the spur of the moment. Lotta exchanged glances with her step-daughter before she replied.

"I'm afraid we're down and out, my boy; there's

something wrong and rotten with the state of Denmark, and it's a shame that women like us, who have never done anybody any harm, should have to suffer through others."

Jimmy Grier had the Scotchman's shrinking from all emotional and personal expression very highly developed, and his brother had already put him in possession of the main facts of the disaster of the week. He looked desperately uncomfortable as he murmured confusedly: "Oh, surely something will turn up, things can't be so very bad, and anyhow you must all have lots of friends who will stand by you."

"Doubtful! There's Bee coming in. I heard her key," said Ida, and a minute later Beatrice appeared looking fresh and cheerful, and bringing a whiff of clear, fine air into the somewhat close atmosphere of the little room. "Oh, good evening, Jimmy, how are you?" she said, with a most friendly smile. "You are very hot in here, surely; I had to walk from the corner; something went wrong with the cable, and there's a high wind getting up."

"Where have you been all this time?" asked Ida, cheering up somehow at sight of her sister's face.

"Well, you see, I stayed to tea with Mrs. Meldrum at the inn and came back by train."

"What train? We looked them up; there's only that one which gets in at six; it's almost eight now."

"I know; I paid a call in Edinburgh; I'll tell you about it later. Did Mr. Grier get home all right, Jimmy? It seemed rather a melancholy old horse in the coach, I thought."

"He got home all right; he was there when I arrived," Jimmy answered. "I don't think I'll stop now, you must have a lot of things to talk over."

"We have some, certainly, but none so very pressing. How long have you come for this time?"

"Only the week-end; I'll have to go by the Sunday night train."

"Well, will you come to tea to-morrow? Can he, Lotta? Have you anything on?"

"What could I have on?" asked Lotta. "Yes, of

course, come to tea to-morrow afternoon and take Ida out for a walk out by Granton. She sticks in the house too much."

Jimmy Grier flushed with pleasure at this direct invitation, which Ida's eyes did not contradict. He shook hands rather effusively with them all and Beatrice showed him out.

"He's a nice boy, that; he'll get on, too. He has a beautiful head," was her remark when she came back.

"A beautiful head, you do say some things; a sallow, underfed-looking youth, I call him; very hard-up, too, like the rest of us."

"He has a head like Burns, don't you notice it, Ida?" asked Beatrice, pointing to a small but fine engraving of the poet which hung above the sideboard.

"Oh, he's all right, but dull, Bee, desperately dull. He thinks of nothing but grinding at his books and cutting up people according to the diagrams and instructions given in them. Come and sit down and tell us everything that has happened since you went away."

Beatrice looked a trifle startled at the suggestion. For the first time she felt in doubt as to the effect her decision to embark on a business career might have on her stepmother and her sister.

She did not expect strenuous opposition, only surprise and possibly some candid criticism.

"I think I'll go up first and take off my things. I've walked a good bit, one way and another, and my feet are tired," she said. "I won't be more than a few minutes; I suppose it's supper time, anyway."

"All right," said Lotta rather curtly, and when the door closed she exchanged glances once more with Ida.

"Don't you think she looks as if she'd had a bit of good luck?" asked Ida. "Her eyes are quite different; they've lost that dull, sad expression."

"Well, if she's met any good luck so much the better—I only hope she'll be prepared to share it," answered Lotta, a trifle ungraciously, but her air of lassitude certainly began to fade. She was inwardly a good deal concerned about her own immediate future, being still in a state of ignorance regarding the remnant of her

husband's estate or its possible disposal. She had not enjoyed the luxury and distinction she had fully expected when she consented to marry a middle-aged lawyer of reputed family and connection, but at least she had had a comfortable enough living, and practically no care. She had waxed fat and lazy in consequence, and the prospect of having to bestir herself once more in the actual business of getting a living dismayed her.

When Beatrice reappeared, Lizzie had brought in the coffee ; the remains of a cold joint and salad stood on the end of the table, and they drew in their chairs. A great many questions were asked by the two who had remained in the house, but the crux of the situation was not seriously approached until Lizzie had removed the supper things. The girl's eyes were red with crying over the master she adored.

Walter Heron had possessed that unpurchasable personal quality which attaches dependants by hooks of steel, obtaining heart-service, full measure, pressed down and running over, apparently without effort, while others obtain with difficulty a meagre return for generous wages.

"Now I've got a lot to tell you," said Beatrice taking the chair in the middle of the hearthrug. "After I came off the train I went to see Madame Theodore——"

"Madame Theodore! Whatever for?" cried Lotta. "Surely you haven't been so extravagant as to order new mourning?"

A gleam of passionate interest, such as a huntress might show at the prospect of running some desired prey to earth, sharpened Lotta's light-blue eyes. The passion of her life was dress, and one of the outstanding grievances of her married life had been the lack of money to buy it. Walter Heron had been most scrupulous regarding his own personal expenditure and that of his household, permitting no bills to be run up. Everything had to be paid for on receipt. It is the only workable rule for those of limited means, and there is no more inexorable check on expenditure than the doling out of hard cash. One or two stormy scenes had occurred in the Heron household through Lotta's disregard of this rule, and only

the threat to "cry down her credit," as she expressed it, with the various tradesmen had really stopped it.

Sales were her joy; she wandered the streets incessantly while they were in progress at the big stores, spending odd shillings on unconsidered and nearly always useless trifles, simply because she thought them bargains, and, therefore, irresistible. So when Beatrice mentioned the name of Madame Theodore the last vestige of her lassitude departed. She was aware that there had been some old acquaintance between the dressmaker and the family, but had no knowledge of its nature or extent.

"What did you want to see her for, this day of all days?" she asked impatiently. "What has she got to do with us, anyway?"

"She will have a great deal to do with me at least," said Beatrice calmly. "She is going to be so kind as to teach me her business."

It was as if a bomb had been dropped in the midst of the homely little room. So surprised indeed was Lotta that she permitted Ida to ask the inevitable question:

"Teach you her business; oh but—Bee, you'll never; will you really?"

"I most certainly shall, dear. I'm to begin to-morrow morning at ten o'clock."

Lotta flopped back in her chair with a small gasp. She had on a very tight-fitting frock which, while accentuating the comparatively small waist line on which she prided herself, caused other parts of her anatomy to spring into undue prominence. Beside the fine lines of Beatrice's splendid figure, and Ida's girlish prettiness, she showed to little advantage. But she was firmly convinced that so far as looks were concerned she could hold her own with her stepdaughters.

"Going to learn to be a dressmaker and milliner, my, but that's a come-down, surely! What's the idea; where did you get it, and will it pay?"

"It will pay, I think, if I give my mind to it. Madame Theodore has made a great deal of money at it."

"I've heard that she has robbed people right and left; her prices are wicked."

"Not that, Lotta! She gives a first-class article for which she asks a first-class price. She always estimates for gowns and people needn't go to her unless they are prepared to pay her price; as a matter of fact they are quite willing to pay. Did you ever hear of a dress-maker with a waiting list of customers? Well, she has one."

Lotta sniffed, intensely interested, for this was a bit of garden ground on which she was perfectly at home, and felt herself competent to speak with authority.

"So she's fleeced the public to the extent that she can retire, and she's willing to teach you her honourable business for what premium, may I ask, and where is it going to come from?"

"There is no premium," answered Beatrice. "Long ago she used to make things for mother. She made the whole of her trousseau, and she has often been at Lin-norie. She exaggerates the kindness shown to her there, and this is her way of acknowledging it."

Beatrice's intelligence, travelling quickly, decided that the truth, or at least a judicious fragment of it, would be the most efficient method of putting a check on her step-mother's chatter. But instantly that lady's imagination darted into a new grove, a sordid grove, in which it could move very freely.

"Of course she's to get something out of it. She'll let people know that Miss Heron is in her employment. Some of these stuck-up people who don't think we're good enough for them now we're down on our luck, will crowd in out of curiosity to see you and glory in your downcome! Oh, I know them, cats, every one of them! I've never seen this Madame Theodore you're so keen on, but I could bet my bottom dollar, as the Americans say, that she sees where she's going to make a bit out of you. She'll exploit you, my dear, but so long as you know and don't care I suppose it's all right."

Ida, both astonished and rather perplexed, regarded her sister's steadfast face with uncertain yet eager eyes.

It was, so far, the most astounding thing that had happened in her life, far more significant than Wally's departure for New Zealand, or even than the tragic

circumstances of the last week. For she was fully aware of Beatrice's pride of race, that it was woven in with every fibre of her being; that she never forgot it for a moment; that their low estate had been informed and in a measure uplifted by it. Certain things they must not, could not, do because of the name they bore. And to hear her sitting there calmly announcing her intention of going into business, of apprenticing herself to Madame Theodore, surely sounded the knell of a regime that could never more be resuscitated. Both of them had already proved the calibre of the social life of their time, and the peculiar inexorable flavour of Edinburgh pride.

Certain things could not be done by certain people because they never had been done, and the few venturesome souls, who for some reason or another defied the conventions which bound the whole crazy fabric together, were just dropped out, no more and no less, just dropped out, the ranks closing over the gaps and continuing to present the same impenetrable front.

Beatrice's grave lips were wooed into a smile by the blank astonishment pictured on Ida's rather childish face.

"Don't look as if the end of the world had come, Baby," she said, using the pet name that had stuck to her younger sister.

"Well, it has, the end of our world, you know it has, Bee. I just can't believe it. Will you really go to that place and cut out frocks and trim hats for other people, all kinds of people, and have them order you about, and treat out as if you were less than an upper servant."

"They won't do that, Baby, not if I can help it."

"You won't be able to help it. I've seen them at it. In the old, old days before the deluge we did it ourselves."

"I think not. Mother was different. It is to her I owe the bit of good fortune which has come to me to-day."

"I don't see much good fortune about it," snapped Lotta, who did not like the tone of the last remark. "What are you to get out of it anyway? I mean, how is it going to help us in our present need. If you've not paid a premium she'll expect you to work at least a year

for nothing. I know the breed, slave drivers and profiteers, every one of them. I hope you made a hard-and-fast bargain with her."

"I didn't make any bargain," answered Beatrice calmly.

"The more fool you! That's so like the Herons, to drift along treating everybody as if they were angels, instead of the devils most of them are. It's the strain that has brought you down to the dust, and hauled me into this mess. Now we are on the subject of the future, while you've been out sorting up a billet for yourself, will you kindly tell me what's in store for the kid and me?"

CHAPTER IX

FOR a fraction of a moment Beatrice was startled and arrested. She had undoubtedly lost sight of the immediate problem of existence as affecting the next few weeks at least.

They did not even know whether the law, staying its hand for a brief space out of compassion for them as innocent victims of the folly of others, might not even on the morrow step in and strip them of all they possessed, leaving them without a roof to cover them. Her eyes lost a trifle of their steadiness as she turned to meet her stepmother's angry glare.

"We shall have to go into things immediately, Lotta ; to-morrow we shall have to find a respectable lawyer. Mr. Grier or the Doctor will most likely know one. Perhaps *you* know one. Did you have anything to do with lawyers before you married father ? "

It was a leading question, which caused an odd flush to spring to Lotta's cheek. As a matter of fact she had had some commerce with lawyers in the year previous to her marriage with Mr. Heron, and had received from a recalcitrant suitor a substantial sum as solatium for a broken promise of marriage. " I don't know anybody—you move in legal circles, and must find one. What I'm afraid of, and fully expecting is, that they'll sell us up and leave us without a chair to sit on, or a bed to lie on. We may have to face the worst yet."

" If we have to, we can find lodgings," said Beatrice, her courage rising with the mountains of difficulty ahead.

" Lodgings ! I hope you'll like 'em when you get 'em. If I have to turn out again and earn my living, I'll be pretty fed up, I can tell you. I was a *fool* to marry as I did—thought it was a noble family that would be above

that sort of thing—well, the sort of thing that has just been shown up.”

Beatrice rose, her face flushing deeply.

“I can’t sit here, Lotta, and hear you speaking like that. You know that father had nothing to do with Mr. Brodie’s defalcations.”

“He ought to have known about them, and prevented them,” snapped Lotta, taking the same line as Mrs. Brodie without knowing it. “I’ve no patience with that highfalutin way of living as if life was a fairy tale, when it isn’t. My God, it’s far enough removed from being a fairy tale! I’ve lost eleven good years, the best years of a woman’s life buried in this hole, and what’s to become of me? You’ll marry, if you weren’t so stuck-up and stand-offish; you could make a good marriage, and set the pendulum swinging the other way. But I’ve lost the best years, and all my chances, and I want to know what you’re going to do for me. I don’t hear either of you suggesting that you’ll do your best to give me a comfortable living, and make me feel it as little as possible. That’s duty if you like, spelled with a big ‘D.’”

Beatrice turned her haunted eyes on her sister’s face. She had really not so far felt any responsibility towards her stepmother, who, not yet forty, strong and well, and in some directions capable, might be expected to regard herself as self-supporting. There was nothing encouraging in Ida’s expression.

“I think Lotta’s quite right, Bee; we must think up something that will include and help her. I wonder what I could do? If only father had let me go to learn shorthand and typewriting when I wanted to last year, I might have been able to earn a good salary now.”

“You’ll always get on, kid,” said Lotta, rather afraid, judging from Beatrice’s expression, that she had said a little too much. “Your face will be your fortune, don’t worry; I’ll stand by you.”

Beatrice’s thoughts, still travelling rapidly though in an entirely new direction, focused themselves on her stepmother’s immediate future. “I will of course do my very best, we both will, Lotta, but you see for yourself

that we are not equipped. It will take time to get a home together. One can't earn money unless one has some equivalent to offer. Madame Theodore as good as told me I should begin to earn quickly. She does not think—that is—she does think that I have the qualities to make a successful business woman. Would it not be possible for you to take a situation as housekeeper, for a time at least, until we turn round ? ”

“ Thank you for nothing ; the prospect does not allure,” said Lotta a trifle sourly.

“ Perhaps after things are looked into there may be enough for you to live on quietly, or at least until you have time to look round,” she said with a tired, desperate note in her voice. “ I don't really think we shall get any further discussing things to-night. Until we have had the lawyer in, and get everything cleared up, we are just wandering round and round getting nowhere. I think I'll go to bed. I've had a tiring day, and I'm not in the mood to talk any further.”

She spoke truly, being indeed on the verge of tears.

No compunction visited the heart of Lotta at the sight of the girl's evident distress. In some vague way she attributed their present misfortune to Beatrice as well as to her father. She had frequently come up against the Heron strain in her elder stepdaughter, something high and lofty and invincible, which had nothing to do with the mere commerce of life. At least, she thought it had nothing to do with it, whereas in Beatrice's case it was to be the dominating factor and was the mainspring of her action that day in visiting Madame Theodore and deciding on a business career. There is no sadder spectacle on God's earth than the poor gentlewoman stranded without means or friends, hedged about by the old traditions and conventions, the destruction of which caused her deeper mental distress than the material privations of poverty. And there are none more difficult to help, because her natural and inherited pride urges her to hide her sufferings and to present a brave, uncomplaining, dignified front to the world.

It was the highest form of family pride which had

enabled Beatrice Heron to go to Madame Theodore, the pride which hates dishonour with an implacable hatred. She knew, none better, that the step she contemplated would cut her off from her own social circle, and that for her there could be no retrieval. Yet to clear her father's name, to shut the mouth of universal condemnation, she was willing to make what was undoubtedly to her a sacrifice of peculiar poignancy.

She suddenly realised that she had not sufficiently reckoned with her stepmother as a factor in the situation.

At the back of her mind, possibly, there had been a nebulous idea that the tragic turn of events, while it could not altogether sever their connection, might at least render close personal association neither possible nor desirable.

But here was Lotta, thrusting her rights in front, demanding what they were going to do with and for her!

The whole of life needed fresh adjustment; it was even more complicated than Beatrice had imagined. She felt a sharp desire for solitude, a strange weakening of all her powers.

"We'll talk it all over to-morrow," she said, rising to her feet. "I'm too tired to think any more. Good night, Lotta! Good night, Baby! Don't sit up late."

Her step was a little less steady than usual as she walked out of the room.

Mrs. Heron dropped her comfortable rounded chin on her hands and looked quizzically across the hearthrug into Ida's face.

"Well, kid, how does it strike you?" Ida shook a bewildered head.

"I just don't know what to make of it, Lotta. Of course, there's something at the back of it, some mighty big thing. Bee simply would never do that off her own bat, so to speak. There's a meaning in it—I don't exactly know what."

Lotta shrugged her shoulders.

"Whatever it is, it's a purely selfish motive. Anybody could see that she had never given either you or me a

thought. But I dare say we'll get along without her. I've thought of several things. Do you know what would be best ? ”

“ No, do tell me ! ” cried Ida eagerly. Never had she felt more remote from Beatrice, it was almost as if some gulf divided them. Beatrice had withheld many confidences in past days from her sister because she was quite well aware that they would be immediately passed on to her stepmother, with whom Ida got on very well. She had received a good deal of petting and stray kindness from her. In her secret heart Lotta was afraid of Beatrice, simply because she did not understand her. Ida was young and plastic ; already the elder woman had left her mark upon her character and temperament. They were both gay and pleasure-loving, liking ease and luxury, and would be less scrupulous than Beatrice regarding the method by which they were achieved. There was complete confidence in Ida's eyes as she asked her stepmother to enlighten her further.

Lotta dropped her hands and glanced rapidly round the room.

“ If we took some of the superfluous things out and put some leaves in the table, we could seat six easily, or even eight.”

“ Whatever are you talking about ? ” asked Ida, in a voice of complete mystification.

“ And if you didn't mind sharing with me we could accommodate four, or even six, in the bedrooms, even supposing that Bee wanted to keep her attic. But perhaps she'll go and live with her dear Madame Theodore ; then that would leave the coast clear for us, and incidentally give us an extra room.”

“ You are thinking of boarders ? ”

Lotta nodded.

“ Yes, it's a paying game if you get the right sort, gentlemen only, and elderly for choice, for they like a bit of home comfort, and when they find it, don't want to change.”

“ But shall we be allowed to keep the house, or the furniture, even ? Bee seemed to be doubtful about it the last time we discussed it.”

"It might be arranged. Now I'm really up against it, and know what Bee has in her mind, I'll bestir myself. I'll make it my business to find a decent lawyer to-morrow. I think I know of one. Then, if we are allowed to sit on here, we can begin advertising and setting all sorts of agencies at work at once. You'd be willing to stop, I hope?"

"Oh yes, why not? I haven't any choice, have I? But I wouldn't be of much use. I could lay tables and arrange flowers, and mend the linen."

"And look pretty, don't forget that. It would be a tremendous asset to the single gentlemen I have in my mind's eye."

That suggestion would have roused Beatrice to anger; it merely provoked a gratified simper on Ida's face. The future suddenly began to brighten and to present possibilities.

"Lizzie isn't a bad sort, and if we can persuade her to stop on we might do worse. You and I would manage the embroideries. We'd take a cue from Madame Theodore, and make our accommodation expensive and exclusive. Supposing we had three or four boarders at three guineas a week, we should get our own board and Lizzie's for nothing, and if Bee stops on and is earning good money, she would contribute to the rent if she didn't pay it altogether. I begin to see light, don't you?"

"It sounds all right, if we could get the boarders," said Ida, but there was a rather doubtful note in her voice.

"I think I could get the boarders; I'd hunt up some of my old office pals. Yes, I'll go out to-morrow, same as Bee did to-day, on a voyage of discovery."

They continued to discuss the possibilities of the boarding house plan for a good hour, and when they parted for the night both were cheerful, even elated. Ida crept up the attic stairs, and seeing a light still under Beatrice's door, pushed it slightly ajar. Beatrice was writing by the light of an oil lamp which also helped to warm the room. She had taken off her skirt and blouse and wore her dressing gown, with her hair hanging down

in two long, thick plaits, which looked almost golden in the lamplight.

"I thought you'd be asleep; who are you writing to, Bee?"

"Finishing a letter to Wally. I began it some days ago. It must go out to-morrow as it's mail day."

"Give him my love. Poor old Wally! Do you think he'll come home, Bee, when he hears what has happened?"

"I'd like to see him, yes, dearly, but what end would it serve? I rather hope he won't. He's getting strong and fit out there, and what prospect is there for a boy here, especially as we are situated now?"

"Not much, certainly, but it's queer to be stranded; a handful of women without a man to protect and advise us."

"Wally's only a boy, dear, he couldn't give us much valuable advice."

"All the same he's a man, and somehow they look at things differently. Lotta and I have been talking. She's got a splendid scheme."

"What's that?"

"To stop on here and take boarders. She says she could get some easily."

Beatrice pondered a moment with her penholder laid against her lips.

"It might do, but we don't know yet whether we shall be allowed to stop on here."

"Father had a lease of the house, hadn't he?"

"Yes, there are just two years to run of the last extension."

"And it's a very cheap rent," Ida pursued.

"It is, only thirty-five pounds. We shouldn't get even a moderate-sized flat for that in a good neighbourhood. This house has points, and if we could stay on it would be a great load off my mind. But would you be willing to stay and help Lotta then?"

"Oh yes, I'd need to. If her experiment is to be a success, both Lizzie and I will need to stay. We were thinking, of course, that we wouldn't be able to afford a help of any kind if we were to go on living alone here."

"It might be quite a good experiment. I'll have a

talk with Lotta to-morrow about it. First thing we must do is to discover exactly how we stand in law. They may have the power and the will to confiscate all father's belongings, and we should be helpless."

"It would be cruel, and what good would our few old sticks do them, anyhow? It would only be a drop in the bucket, even if they sold them at quite fair prices."

Beatrice could not gainsay that, the thought gave her a sharp and peculiar pang.

"Our scheme seems quite wise and prudent and practical beside yours. I really can't picture you working at Madame Theodore's, Bee. Do you think you'll like it?"

"It isn't a question of what we like now, dear, but what is best to be done. I'll endure it, anyhow, and Madame Theodore herself will be a tremendous help. She's an old dear. You've no idea how sweet and kind she was to me to-day."

"Was she?" In Ida's eyes dwelt a puzzled expression, which was only deepened by her sister's next words.

"My hope and intention is to try and make money and pay back some of what is owing to the poor people who are going to suffer through all this."

"The clients, you mean? But do you think you need worry about them. They can't be any worse off than we are, and anyway, it isn't exactly our business. I'm sure the Brodies have got money left. They ought to do it."

"I can't legislate for the Brodies, Ida, but I know what I feel about father. I sort of know that he's expecting me to clear his name."

Ida looked round almost fearfully, as if expecting to see some shadow lurking in the dimly-lit corners of the eyrie.

"You're very creepy, Bee. All I hope is poor father is at rest, and I think if you get your own living and help us to get ours, you'll do very well. I shouldn't worry too much about our name. What has it ever done for us, anyway? If I can find a decent man to offer me his, I shan't mind about changing, only he must be well off, very well off, or it's no good."

"You'll have to wait till Jimmy Grier climbs to the pinnacle," said Beatrice on the spur of the moment.

"Depends on how long he takes to get there," said Ida demurely. "Well, I'm off to bed, good night again, Bee. My, but aren't we in the thick of it? It seems years and years since last Sunday when nothing had happened, and we had cold mutton for dinner, and poor father didn't like it."

CHAPTER X

ALISON GRIER was a daughter of the Manse. The eldest of a large family, she had early acquired the mothering instinct and touch which is one of the most precious ingredients of home-happiness. Therefore the Manse of Little Trinity, as it was called, was in some ways an exceptional home. Donald Grier was rather a large, solemn person, partly perhaps because his youth had been severely disciplined by the mother who had tried to combine dual parentage in her parental programme. That it had answered so well said something not only for her, but for the material she had handled. There can be no doubt that obedience is a first necessity of the human soul, bringing a kind of secret joy in its train. That element, so largely absent from the family life of to-day, will have to be restored to its ordained place in the home before we shall see the betterment for which we long and pray.

But Donald Grier remained a serious person, punctuated by occasional gleams of brightness. Alison was all bright. She had the merriest laugh, a quick eye for the funny side of things, a ready tongue, and a smile which covered all sins of omission and commission.

She had a fight, with restricted means and five children, but had always something to spare for others. And nobody ever heard her grouse or complain. Sometimes, it is true, she looked ruefully at her own shabby clothes, thinking, with a trace of womanly vanity, how she could have adorned better ones. She had been very pretty in her youth, with that clean, healthful beauty which owes nothing to art, and she had managed, in spite of hard work, to retain a good share of her looks. Plenty of cold water, healthful exercise, plain food in moderation, were her recipes.

And the Manse of Little Trinity was a place which somehow always did good to those who visited it. Its shabby carpets and rather cheap furniture were forgotten because of the atmosphere in which they were envisaged.

Then there were books, all kinds of books, books large and small, serious and light, as necessary to the Griers as bread to eat. Alison never grudged what Donald spent on books, nay, she aided and abetted him sometimes in a sinful extravagance, even plotting to give him certain ones which were his heart's desire. The price of a book was often the price of her new gloves, or stockings, or some household article for which she substituted some ingenious makeshift.

The possessors of large and gorgeous libraries which have cost them no sacrifice know nothing of the inner and secret joy in the hearts of passionate book lovers like Donald and Alison Grier, to whom every new book, every true book, was a milestone in their lives.

To her husband's brother Alison had been a sister indeed. He told her everything, all his hopes and fears, his secret ambitions, his determination to make good. In return she mended and made for him, wrote letters to him full of good cheer, and funny little vignettes of the children when some note in his weekly letter from Glasgow indicated his need for encouragement. And she was, of course, perfectly aware that he had a fondness for Isabel Heron.

This was a disappointment to her, for she had set her heart on his marrying Beatrice.

Between Alison Grier and Beatrice Heron there was a beautiful friendship, strong, steady and quiet, not dependent on frequent meetings; the kind that endures through all. They had met only once since the great upheaval, but Alison was biding her time, fully aware that the day would come when Beatrice would unburden her heart, and unfold her plans for the future.

When Jimmy came dropping in about half-past eight that night, he found his brother's wife alone, darning stockings, every child gone to bed, and the minister in the study getting ready for Sunday.

Alison was a small, plump person, with a nicely rounded figure, an open, charming face in which still remained the pink of girlhood, a quick, restless grey eye full of kindness and good will, lots of pretty hair which rippled naturally, and a very neat foot. She was proud of her feet, and broke the tenth commandment more often before a good bootmaker's window than anywhere else. She was always well shod, however, because she knew both how to buy and take care of shoes.

"You're as solemn as an owl, Jimmy-boy," was her greeting. "Are they wailing and gnashing teeth round there—Steppy, I mean?"

Just occasionally Alison permitted herself a little vulgar snap in her voice when speaking about Mrs. Heron, whom she very heartily loathed, regarding her as an alien bird in a nest which she did not fit.

"No, no, they're quite calm."

"I see. Was Beatrice there?"

"She came in while I was there—it made me leave more quickly perhaps. She had been at the funeral."

"Yes, of course, Donald told me that; but surely she had stopped a long time at Marriston."

She glanced at the black marble presentation clock, so often the ornament and useful mentor on a manse dining-room mantelpiece.

"Had anything to eat?"

"No, of course not, but I'm not hungry."

"We'll give Don till half-past nine. He's wrestling with Job, honest man. I didn't think Job a good choice for this particular Sunday, but he's taking him on the ascending scale, and not among the potsherds. Well, what are they saying to it at The Outlook?"

"They didn't say much to me. I wasn't there long, only about ten minutes. Directly Miss Heron came in I felt that they must have a lot of things to talk over."

"Atmosphere friendly?"

"Oh quite, I'm going back to-morrow."

"To go for a walk with Isabel?"

Alison's eyes were kind, but rather penetrating.

Jimmy reddened as he answered.

"They didn't say. We might all go for a walk."

"It's unlikely," remarked Alison shortly. "Three's company, you know. I think I know what's in your mind, dear."

She was five years Jimmy's senior, and her motherly air was delightful.

"I daresay, Ailie; you've a way of knowing most things."

Her face became a little wistful.

"But I'm not a meddlesome Matty, I hope. It isn't that you're meaning, is it?"

"Goodness, no! just a good sort, the best in the world. And, of course, you've guessed I'm hoping to marry Ida Heron some day—If only I could put the clock forward a bit!"

"Don't want that, Jimmy. Sometimes it's back we want to put it, and if we ever succeed, even in the most minor degree, it's all wrong. Something like the weather, you know. No sample would ever please everybody. Don't be in a hurry. I want life to be beautiful and kind to you, Jimmy."

"It won't be unless I can get her, Alison."

"And supposing for a minute you should be out with her by yourself to-morrow, are you going to tell her that?"

"It depends," he said cautiously. "It might be a help to her just now, for it is easy to see that they don't know which way to turn."

"Your own future is a wee bit uncertain, dear; no, not uncertain, because we know where you're going to land, but it must mean waiting a good while, and long engagements are trying to certain temperaments—Ida Heron's would be one."

"Everybody can't jump into matrimony the way you and Don did it," said Jimmy, harking back to what had been a lightning courtship and a wholly unpremeditated marriage.

"You can hold your tongue, my child, and contemplate the concrete result," said Alison demurely. "Only—only——"

She paused there, for she could not very well call attention to the fundamental difference between herself and Ida Heron.

"I can't help wishing it had been Beatrice," she said at last, getting her private grievance off her mind.

"Beatrice!"

Alison could not forbear a laugh at the complete consternation depicted on her brother-in-law's face.

"And why not Beatrice, pray?" she asked. "She's the very salt of the earth."

"The Polar star, you mean! The man that sets out to win her will deserve the V.C., Ailie, he'll have earned it."

"Now you're merely being spiteful, James. Has she ever snubbed you?"

"No, she's always been very kind to me, but you never forget when you're speaking to her that she's Miss Heron, with Linnorie and centuries of tradition behind her."

"Very well put, does you credit, but you should see her down in my kitchen, helping me to redd up, or, better still, with the bairns in the bathroom, scrubbing them and singing to them. If I were a man that's the one I'd be crazy about; but then, you men! Well, that's what makes you so adorable; you never grow up, or are able to discern properly what side your bread's buttered on."

"Maybe not, but I couldn't marry Beatrice Heron if she was the last woman left in the world, and me the last man."

"Grammar taught here," she said jumping up. "Let's go and rout out Donald."

"But you won't say anything to him?"

"What do you take me for?" she asked indignantly. "I only tell Don what's good for him, and this might give him indigestion and cause him to be unjust to Job. Don't be in a hurry, dear Jimmy. I've a very good mind to come with you to-morrow to 'The Outlook' and play gooseberry to your walk."

He smiled, but Alison's eyes continued rueful. She did not want Jimmy to speak irrevocable words to Ida

Heron, though cornered, she might have found it extremely difficult to dispose of her objections. The waiting prospect was only the feeblest obstacle; given the right kind of lovers the long engagement has its points. But it applies the acid test to inferior brands, and Alison honestly believed that Ida Heron had no depth of character, but was selfish to the core.

Nevertheless, Jimmy did speak the irrevocable word the next afternoon when, in the soft greyness of one of those pensive afternoons February so often gives us, he walked with Ida Heron away beyond the Granton breakwaters till they came to a little strip of pebbly beach where there were no stragglers and where they sat down for a few minutes to rest on the upturned keel of a derelict boat.

They had not talked very much during their walk, excepting about impersonal things. Ida was looking very pretty. Her fair colouring defied the subjugation of black clothes, nay, the sombre hue set off her fairness; Jimmy's eyes were lover's eyes as he devoured them.

"Let's talk about ourselves now, Ida. Have you laid any plans for the future?"

"We lay them, but whose going to carry them out? I went with Lotta to see a lawyer this morning. He doesn't think they'll grab our furniture and things."

"Good Heavens, why should they? It would be inhuman."

"Oh, but they might. I suppose it would be within their rights. So it's likely we'll stay where we are and take boarders."

"Take boarders, and you wait on them?" cried Jimmy aghast.

"Well, I'd have to help to do for them," she said with a little malicious gleam in her eyes. "We're hoping to keep on Lizzie Anderson; she would do the necessary waiting, if she didn't scare them out of the house with her tongue; Lotta will run the show and I'll provide the frills."

"What kind of lodgers? Ladies, I hope."

"Oh dear no! Lotta wouldn't look at them; calls them cats, and all sorts of other names which makes

Bee positively squirm ; gentlemen boarders, middle-aged and rich. They must be rich and willing to pay ; these are the first essentials of a good boarder, according to Mrs. Heron."

" Does your sister approve of this ? "

" She doesn't say much. She daren't criticise in the face of what she's going to do herself."

" What's that ? " asked Jimmy interestedly.

Ida explained with much relish. After all, Jimmy Grier was a friend of the family, and there could be no harm in discussing the situation with which all their little world must soon become familiar.

His round eyes betrayed his astonishment.

" I can't imagine it ! Miss Heron in a dressmaker's shop ! "

" Salon," corrected Ida with a little smile, " Madame Theodore would have a thousand fits if she heard her exclusive place called a shop."

" It's the same in essence," maintained Jimmy stoutly ; " cutting out frocks and trying them on other women. I don't believe she'll be a success."

" Tell me why you think that, Jimmy ; yes, you must, no hedging, tell me at once."

" Won't she freeze people out, patronise them, make them wonder that they ever had presumption to go there ? "

Ida's smile of amusement deepened. " It sums up a bit of Bee very accurately, I must admit. That's the line Lotta takes with Bee, but she's got another side."

" So Donald's wife says—she adores her."

" I know," said Ida with a little grimace, " and the same lady has no use for me."

" She knows nothing about you," said Jimmy, far too guileless to camouflage the truth. " So that's the programme ! I don't like it for you, Ida—I wish to Heaven——"

" What do you wish, Jimmy ? " asked Ida very softly, gently encouraging. She was just in the mood for a little tender passage, the hour and the place were favourable.

"Well, you know—if only I was through, and established in a good way of doing, you'd listen to me, wouldn't you?"

"Listen to what?" she asked provokingly. "You're very vague this afternoon, Jimmy, and we're dealing, unfortunately for us, with hard facts."

"Well, you know, I—I care about you—I want to marry you. Will you marry me, Ida, the moment I have anything decent to offer you?"

There was a crucial pause, for Ida Heron, though pleased with her first definite offer of marriage, and very fond of the offerer, had no passion or loyalty to give in exchange for his.

"I like you awfully, Jimmy," she said in a small rather halting voice, "but you see it's all so vague; do you think it would be wise or prudent to tie ourselves up now?"

"What has wisdom or prudence got to do with love?" cried Jimmy growing bolder now that he had cast the die.

"It has a good deal to do with life. If my poor father had been wise and prudent we shouldn't be where we are to-day," she said shrewdly.

"Oh, that's different! Look here, darling, I'll be through at midsummer and then I've got to have six months in hospital, and then I'd be ready to settle down."

"Where and what on?" she asked. "How do you stand financially, Jimmy? It sounds horrid mean and mercenary, I know, but I like you too well to tie myself like a millstone round your neck—I'm not going to do it."

"I don't stand well financially," he admitted with a very gallant honesty. "I've got money to pay back to my brother, but that's the only debt; but I'm going to make good, and if you'll only promise, Ida, I'll work like a galley slave."

"And probably work yourself into the grave. We all thought you looked very thin last night, and as if you didn't ever get enough to eat."

"That's got nothing to do with it. Folks can live

on very little when there's anything to be gained by it."

"I can't; I like good food and plenty of it, so does Lotta; Bee's the bun-and-coffee woman. What a pity you didn't think of Bee first!"

Jimmy Grier flushed a trifle angrily at this. Why should he have Beatrice Heron thrust upon him twice within the space of a few hours?

"I'd be scared to death of your sister, and he'll be a bold chap that asks her to share his lot," he said on the spur of the moment. "Well listen, Ida, darling."

"I'm listening, but I haven't given you any right to call me that," she said demurely.

"But you don't hate it—I mean you do like me, don't you, Ida?"

"In moderation—no, go away, we haven't threshed it out yet, Jimmy. Where should we get furniture for our house? Where should we get a house at all? All these things cost money, you know, oceans of the money we haven't got."

"There are ways of getting them," he said vaguely.

"Yes, I know, the hire system, and then some day when you haven't paid up twopence halfpenny, or maybe only a penny farthing, some beastly men arrive with a cart and take everything away, and you sit on the bare boards; that happened to some people in our road. Lotta seemed to know all about it. That's how it's done."

"I wasn't thinking of the hire system of furniture," said poor Jimmy patiently, "but of things that might turn up."

"We couldn't marry, or even get engaged, Jimmy, on the prospect of things turning up. You see we happen to be two healthy human beings who need food to eat and clothes to wear and a house to live in, and I don't see where they are going to come from in your case for years and years."

"I'll get them!" cried Jimmy in a passion of determination, "Other men have succeeded and so will I!"

Besides, my chief says I will, and both Don and Alison believe in me."

"Oh, I believe in you all right, Jimmy; don't think anything but that! Only we'll be aged and grey before anything happens. Don't you think now we'd better keep ourselves free?"

Jimmy presented a picture of complete distress and dour determination.

"Well, anyway, don't look as if the end of all things had come! If it will do you any good I'll promise to marry you some day. I really like you enough for that, Jimmy. It's only prudence speaking, and if somebody hasn't got prudence in the matrimonial venture what becomes of the poor wee ship?"

"It comes into harbour all right," cried Jimmy, for whom the sun shone again, and there being nobody in sight but one or two stray seagulls eyeing them solemnly from the crest of the incoming wave he took her to his heart. She was ready to be petted and made much of; it was a new sensation; but there was not in her eyes the melting tenderness which proclaims the surrender of a woman's heart, and promises loyalty against every assault of fate. Jimmy Grier, poor, proud, ambitious, determined to succeed for love's sake, had gotten the promise he desired, and thrown everything else to the wind!

But promise and fulfilment are two different things.

"We'll keep it dark, Jimmy," said Ida, as they prepared to go from their trysting place. "Very, very dark! We'll get into trouble if we don't. Besides, I should hate to have our secret known yet. Let us keep it to ourselves."

"I don't feel like that. I want to get upon the housetops and proclaim my good luck."

"That would be quite fatal, my child. No, no; we'll just go on working quietly, me at home and you in Glasgow until the time comes."

"But you'll write!" he cried jealously. "Once a week or maybe twice; I'll be writing every day."

"No you won't; think of the cost of stamps! Once a week only."

"And you'll be true to me, darling ; you won't ever forget ? " he asked, standing still in the middle of the wrack of the little beach and suddenly facing her.

"Oh yes ; don't look like that, Jimmy Grier ! Would you murder me if I didn't ? "

"There's no saying," he said with a queer break in his voice as he stooped to take his first lover's toll of her lips.

CHAPTER XI

LINNORIE woods in spring! Could there be a more winsome, enchanting spot? Critics called them straggling, pointing to the absence of fine timber, of stately spreading beech or elm of which others boasted, but Linnorie had a tender, an intimate charm known only, because revealed only, to the understanding. The modest park melted into the Linnorie woods, which then spread sparsely up the sloping hills which sheltered the house from some of the winds that blew. They offered cover to the wild things that had never been hunted in them, and all the flowers that grow in solitary places found their way, sooner or later, wafted on winnowing and discerning winds, to their appointed place.

In spring, then, the Linnorie woods were carpeted with the mosaic of those little tender blooms which are nature's first nurslings, and have no marrow. Monica Brodie, wandering delightedly along the woodland ways, noted every fresh clump of primrose or violet. Sometimes she stooped and laid her face close to them, to inhale their fragrance, and perhaps hearken for the sott beat of nature's heart. She was a gentle little thing, rather dark and elf-like, a disappointment to the mother whose ambitions were large and inclined to showiness. Linnorie had disappointed Mrs. Brodie chiefly because she found that the roots of the Herons were ineradicable, but Monica loved every stick and stone of the old house, revelled in its traditions and its memories, and bore no ill-will at all nor yet cherished any jealousy of the old stock.

A simple, pure-minded, solitary child, she had just returned from two months' sojourn on the south coast, where her mother had sought distraction from the tragic upheaval, and some escape from censorious tongues.

They had returned hastily only the previous evening, summoned by telegram, announcing John's arrival in London, whence he would travel to Scotland in due course. Everything had waited for this arrival which would mark an epoch in their family life.

April airs were abroad, and now and again the sighing winds were punctuated by the soft appealing cry of the lambs which had thriven sturdily through one of the snellest Marches on record.

For a solid month the earth had been in the grip of frost and snow, and when it was removed almost in a night by the soft caress of the west wind, the waiting spring sprang to life and action in hot haste to comfort the eyes and hearts weary of the long winter. The miracle of spring, each year renewed so that seedtime and harvest may, not fail had been thus more pronounced than usual. Monica revelled in it. Her head was bare and her short elf-like locks which gave to her piquant little face an odd pathetic young boyish look, her short skirts and serviceable brogues encasing the neatest of feet, the thick woollen coat open at the neck to let the wind play there, all spoke of her love of the outdoor life, and her kinship with it. Monica's only care for her complexion was to turn it to the wind and the rain, consequently its texture was clear and firm, its glow most natural and beautiful. Monica thought not at all about her looks, nor believed that she had any charm. Indeed, her mother had so often by words, and in other ways, expressed her chastened disapproval of Monica altogether that the girl had shrunk into herself. She had been a leggy seventeen-year-old creature when her brother, the beloved Johnnie, had gone abroad, for some unexplained reason, turning his back on Scotland and the good living apparently lying to his hand. Now he was coming back after four long years, and Monica could not hold herself. She did not wish to be present at the first meeting between John and their mother, and she hoped somehow that she would meet him out of doors. She was not disappointed. As she waited close to a gate which gave upon a newly-planted section of the hill she heard the brushwood crackling and flew to meet him; then somehow it was

as if she drooped slightly and stood back. What if the beloved Johnnie should be changed, alienated by dividing seas and the interests that had claimed him there? But when she saw his dear face all her misgivings vanished, and she ran, yes ran, and was folded in arms so long and big and strong that they closed round her with the deep gesture of protection which that kind of man somehow gives by right.

"Oh Johnnie, my Johnnie!" she sobbed, and John Brodie's own eyes were wet as he laid his lips to his little sister's tossed and elf-like locks.

"My wee wifie, there, there! then never mind; it's all right."

"Is it all right, Johnnie? Last night in my bed I was afraid, and this morning I just knew that if I had had to wait another day I'd have gone mad or died or run away."

"So bad as that, wee wifie?" he said, then took her chin in his hand and turned her face to him and looked down into it with eyes sharpened by love. "Thank God you're not changed," he said in a voice of deep satisfaction.

"Oh, but I've grown up, Johnnie, and gotten into long frocks, but mother says it's a poor growing-up; that I have no presence, and oh, Johnnie, I've been needing you just—just desperately!"

"I won't let you go again, my dear."

"Won't let me go? Have you come home, my Johnnie then, for good?" Her voice was breathless, her eyes full of wistfulness touched with passion.

"As to that, I don't know—it depends."

On what it depended Monica had some sort of idea. It had been dinned into her early and late how much depended on her brother's home-coming. Everything had waited for it. Now he was here, looking so big and strong and handsome, Monica suddenly cast her fear and her loneliness from her like garments no longer to be worn or needed.

Handsome the adoring Monica called her brother; but he was not that. Strong and big, over six feet in height, and broadly built, with features which in repose were harsh, deep-set eyes which very few had fathomed,

John Brodie did not seem to feature either his father or mother very strongly. He looked old for his years, which were eight and twenty, and he had been bearing a man's part in a responsible position for the last four.

"Have you seen mother?" asked Monica, coming down to earth.

"Yes, she looks very little different. No, we haven't talked of anything; I said it must wait until I had found you."

"You came by the night train; how is it you are so late getting here? Isn't it nearly lunch time?"

"I only travelled from York to-day. I had business there for a man I met in the East. It was convenient to put it through on my way north."

She suddenly hid her face against his coat and pulled his arm more tightly round her.

"It's the deluge, Johnnie; we've had an awful three months. I suppose mother has told you what really happened?"

"She has, but I knew. We get newspapers, you know, out there; I've had my fill of them."

The note in his voice was intensely bitter. Of a high honour and integrity the circumstances under which his father had passed out from the world of men and things had inflicted a wound which would be long healing in John Brodie's heart.

"The newspapers!" Monica shivered a little. "They were awful. They said lots of cruel things about Daddy and even about Mr. Heron."

"And he has gone, too, poor old chap. Tell me about the family."

"Oh, they are so poor, Johnnie. I don't understand why or how it is that they should be like that, while we appear to have all we need same as we've always had. Mother doesn't like it when I speak about it; she always tells me to hold my tongue, and that I don't understand things."

John Brodie's face set in its sternest mould.

"Perhaps she was wise to talk to you like that, wee wifie. These are things too big for you to grip."

"Oh, why do you say that? Surely even a person of

no importance like me can be permitted some gleams of intelligence. It doesn't take so very much to know that it isn't fair that the Herons should have nothing and we enough. Shall we leave Linnorie, Johnnie? I was trying to say good-bye to-day, but it isn't going to be easy."

"I can't say off-hand. Everything will have to be gone into, but between ourselves, yes, I think we will leave Linnorie—we haven't any right here now. As a matter of fact I never have felt that we had any right here."

"Oh, Johnnie, to hear you say that! It's just what I've felt so often. We don't belong, nothing will ever make us belong. The people only suffer us. The Herons are rooted here, and nothing will ever take them clean away. Other people may come and go, but it will only be to find themselves companioned by ghosts of the Herons and old Linnorie."

Brodie listened in amazement, realising for the first time what the years had actually done for his little sister.

"You've grown up with a vengeance, wee wifie; where did you get all this?"

"Oh, I didn't get it—it's just inside of me, and when I saw Beatrice Heron here one day——"

"Which one is that?"

"The eldest one. To think you've never seen Beatrice Heron, Johnnie, nor she you! She's the embodiment of everything the Herons have ever been in the history of Scotland."

"She must be a truly remarkable young woman, my dear."

"Oh, she is, Johnnie, and to think of her working in a dressmaker's shop. I can't sleep at nights sometimes, because of it."

"Working in a dressmaker's shop!" he said in a puzzled voice. "But why? Wasn't there anything else offering a gentlewoman in Edinburgh?"

"I don't understand it quite," said Monica with a deep sigh, "and it enrages mother whenever it is mentioned. She says it has let us all down, and that it should have been prevented. Then Mrs. Heron and Ida have started to keep lodgers in the house where they live at Trinity,

and I believe they are doing quite well. It is we who are all wrong, Johnnie, and you must put us right. If it is true what the papers said that father robbed people," she gave a little shudder again, "then I think we should be out working for our living too, and not going on just as if nothing had happened."

Brodie thought so too, but it was not the moment for deep discussion of such a vital issue.

"Let us go back to the house, wee wifie. Things will get redd up by and by. Meanwhile let me get a breathing space in this caller air. I tell you what, Monica, the East has its uses, and I like it very well, but it's best use is to prove what Scotland really is. I'd like to live and die here, wee wifie, and if it has to go it will tear me to pieces."

"I know, but don't let us keep it if—if it belongs to all the people Daddy got money from, and somehow lost it. Oh, they said such cruel things about him, Johnnie, and think of it! If he had lived they would have put him in prison."

Brodie set his teeth and forbore to answer. His homecoming was even more bitter than he had anticipated, and only the courage and the stern resolve to do what one man wholly innocent and heavily handicapped could do to right the wrong enabled him to face it. It was strange that the two children of Compton Brodie and his wife should be pure idealists, who had broken clean away from the tenets of the Brodie creed. The chief of these tenets was self-advancement. Inspired by the wife he adored, and who adored him, though it did not prevent her being at times his goad, he had plunged deeper and deeper into speculation in his haste to be rich. And the most poignant of all the spectres which haunted him in the awful moment when he decided to take his own life was not the anguish and despair of the helpless people he had robbed, but the accusing eyes of his wife.

It was because he had feared to meet them that he had, in his distraction, sought and found the coward's release.

If Maud Brodie knew this she manifested no outward sign. She was a strange, cold woman, though not in the sense that Beatrice Heron was considered cold.

That was only the natural reserve of a still, proud

nature. Mrs. Brodie's was the deadly coldness of utter selfishness, the most paralysing quality in the whole gamut of human character and experience. When therefore, a little later in the afternoon, she found herself in the grip of her son's cross-questioning, the atmosphere very quickly became tense, charged with all kinds of sinister electricity.

"What I want to know, mother," said John very deliberately, "is how my father ever allowed himself to become so deeply, irretrievably involved in that nefarious kind of speculation."

"Be careful of your adjectives, John," she cried, almost shrilly. "I permit no aspersions on your father's memory."

"I am not out for that, mother," he replied in his sombre voice. "But merely to collect the facts. I am entitled to them, and you are entitled to put me in possession of them so far as you know them."

His tone though quiet, was authoritative. She perceived in him a greater change even than he had found in Monica. He was no longer a boy, but a man, in the full tide and alacrity of a man's intelligence and grip of affairs. And he would permit no evasion of the real issue, indeed the only one which meantime presented itself to his imagination and clear vision, i.e., how far they, as representatives and legatees of the dead man, were morally, if not legally responsible for the heavy burden he had left.

"Your father never brought his business cares or affairs home, John. He was most scrupulous about that. I knew practically nothing about them."

"But surely," said John, with a doubtful note in his voice,—“did he never speak about these tremendous undertakings in which he got himself mixed up abroad?”

"I knew that he was interested in mines," she admitted, but with obvious unwillingness.

John realised in a flash that his mother, whatever she knew or guessed, had no intention of giving him a full confidence. But she could not close the door of his inquiring lips.

"I've come home to clear up things, so far as they can

be cleared now, mother, and you could help me. Does this mean that you are not going to do it ? ”

She met his gaze without flinching.

“ I don’t know exactly what you mean by clearing up things. One point I will make very clear to you. I won’t rake up the past any more. Things are simmering down, and to re-open it all would be not only foolish, but disastrous. I have Monica to think of—I suppose you would say I need not think of you.”

“ That does not alter the main facts,” said John, with a steady sadness which was deepening every minute. “ My father died by his own hand, knowing perfectly well that if he had lived he would have been chargeable to the law regarding his misuse of trust moneys.”

“ You are brutal, John ! If this is all the East has done for you I am sorry you did not stay there.”

John decided to pass this peevish utterance by. “ The truth is sometimes brutal. What I want to know is how I find you and Monica living here very much as you were living when I was home before. What I don’t understand at all is how you have been permitted to do so.”

She hesitated a moment before she answered, possibly because she was perfectly aware that the only answer she could make would not be acceptable to her son in his present mood.

“ Your father loved me, John, with a kind of love which is rare in this world, and which I don’t expect for a moment you will ever experience. He safeguarded me long ago, that is all. When he bought Linnorie from the Herons, eleven years ago, he gave it to me. The place is mine, and nobody can touch it.”

She spoke with a slight air of triumph, which filled her son with amazement and a most righteous anger.

“ He had not the right to do that.”

“ Pardon me, I do not permit you to use such terms in speaking of your father. He is not here to answer for himself,” she cried angrily ; but even these passionate words failed to stem the tide of John Brodie’s righteous anger and indignation.

“ Eleven years ago, not very long after he entered into

partnership with Mr. Heron. I don't understand where he got the money."

"You would not, for you have never done justice to your father's quality," she answered scathingly. "He was a splendid financier and a rich man when he bought out the Herons."

"What I don't understand in the light of all that happened is why he ever entered into partnership with Mr. Heron," said John doggedly. At the back of his mind he had no doubt at all as to the motive. The firm was one which had stood for four generations in Edinburgh for all that was finest in the profession. Compton Brodie had operated through these traditions, finding in them his principal asset, a splendid and enduring background for his operations outside.

But so sickened was John Brodie's soul and conscience over the whole sordid story that he could not trust himself to dwell on that point. His mother, however, was ready with her answer.

"Your father had a very tender side, John, though you never saw it. You did not make any attempt to get on with him."

"I did not understand him, mother," said John quickly. "And he had very little use for me."

"He thought you a milksop, and said you'd never make a good business man," she retorted. "And that was the reason he urged you to accept the appointment you got the chance of when you left the University."

Brodie abruptly changed the subject.

"Then it is your intention to stay on here in Linnorie?" —he very nearly added—"Thus flaunting your position in the face of the public that has been wronged."

"No—I loathe the place—I want to get away from Edinburgh. I only waited until you came back, but this sort of talk won't get us any nearer one another, I'm afraid, and most likely now I know your views I shall act entirely on my own initiative."

"How big is the place now?" asked John, "and how much is it worth?"

"I can't give you the boundaries and dimensions. The bailiff or my lawyer will do that. But at the time

of the transfer your father sold one or two of the farms to the tenants. It is much smaller than it was in the Herons' time. All the mortgages were paid up by that means, and now it is a very compact little estate, and could be exploited for building, I believe. Anyhow, you may be sure I will sell it to the highest bidder."

"And settle in Edinburgh?"

She shook a most emphatic head. "Not I. I loathe Edinburgh too, and have always loathed it. I shall go south. They are a more kindly people there. Torquay perhaps, or if not so far, Cheltenham or Southsea. Will you go back to the East? How long leave have you?" By these questions she sought to divert him from the more painful argument on which his gloomy thoughts seemed to be fixed.

Maud Brodie felt no personal responsibility towards the clients who had suffered through her husband. Faced with it she would most undoubtedly have sought refuge in the specious contention that they ought to have shown keener vision and insight and not put all their eggs in one basket. There are natures so constituted that they feel no responsibility towards their fellow men, for whom they have little use, except as ministers to their personal prosperity or need.

That was Maud Brodie's attitude towards life and the world, and she was directly responsible for the downfall of the man who, strong in some directions, had been as weak as water in her hands.

She had poisoned and weakened his moral fibre in the most subtle and insidious way, though such a suggestion would have filled her with rage and indignation. She was not conscious either of the depth of her own influence nor the magnitude of her corroding selfishness on the souls of others. Those whom circumstances have bound to that form of selfishness are to be pitied; they need all the help God and man can give them.

Maud Brodie was a wife first and a mother after. She had never really wanted children, and had taken little joy in them, though when they grew up into presentable creatures she had a certain pride.

There are none quicker than children to miss the most

essential element in the family life. Robbed of it they stand naked to the world, ready to become the sport of fate. It was the atmosphere of his home which had caused John Brodie to accept the first post that was offered to him, that of private secretary to a well-known Government servant, to whom something in his personality had appealed. It had been a very successful and happy appointment for John Brodie, and his own preferment and ultimate success in the governing world was only a matter of time. He had all the qualities, informed and uplifted by the idealism already mentioned.

But the best side of him could never be shown to his mother because she had no use for it, nor could have understood it. As they sat opposite to one another, alike yet unlike, they were strangers. It laid a sadness which could not be uttered on Brodie's soul, a sadness deeper in some respects than his grief over the disastrous turn his family affairs had taken.

"Have you seen anything of the Herons since?" he asked on the spur of the moment.

CHAPTER XII

AN odd expression flitted across Mrs. Brodie's face as she replied.

"Not very lately. The last time I saw any of them was when Miss Heron called here on the day they came out to bury her father."

"Monica tells me they are all very hard up, and working for their living."

"So I have heard. I don't just grasp Miss Heron's objective in becoming an apprentice to a dressmaker and milliner. It's a sort of pride, I suppose, a pose before the world as sitting in sackcloth and ashes for her father's sins of omission or commission."

John made no answer, but a queer, quick interest sprang into his eyes. His mother suddenly sat forward, her features perceptibly hardening.

"I blame Mr. Heron a good deal for all that happened, John."

"How and why do you blame him? Was he a party to the mining speculations? I should have thought him the very last man to be interested in that kind of thing."

"He could have prevented some of them. If he had been of any use at all, he could have applied a mild break on your father's actions. I told the Herons that his ignorance and slackness were just as culpable, even more so in my opinion, than your father's hardihood."

Brodie found it difficult to follow, much less to confute this line of argument. All he said was:

"You haven't seen Miss Heron since she went into business, then?"

"I have not. She has apprenticed herself, apparently, to Madame Theodore, who has a very good business built up on exorbitant prices and an assumption of

superiority and style I have never seen justified by any of her creations," said Mrs. Brodie, with a snap in her voice born of resentment at Madame Theodore's steady refusal to book her as a customer.

"Her stepmother and sister, I understand, are taking boarders. I should think Mrs. Heron might easily be a success at that. It would be in her line of things, an impossible person! That Mr. Heron could bring himself to marry a woman of that class shows that his mental and moral decline must have begun some years ago."

"They are keeping boarders while everything goes on here just as usual," said Brodie, with a quick glance round the beautiful room whose noble proportions were accentuated by the sober richness of its furnishings and appointments. It was the room in which Compton Brodie had died, and it said something for his widow's courage and firmness of character that she had continued it as the living room of the house, precisely as if nothing had happened in it.

Mrs. Brodie did not take up the challenge, but stared into the red glow of the wood fire and appeared to wait for her son's further speech.

"I must say I don't think it is fair, mother. Don't *you* see any incongruity in it?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Of course it is a pity they have to do it, but Walter Heron was a poor man long before this happened. He was practically ruined when he met your father. Linnorie was mortgaged up to the hilt, and I know for certain that your father lent him money from time to time, which was never paid back."

"Wasn't there a son? Where is he?"

"He went to New Zealand, they made his health the excuse, but I believe that the real reason was that he was shiftless. The stepmother has some relatives farming out there, it seems, and the only thing I ever heard about young Heron was that he likes the life. We had a garden party here once, and the Herons came. She told me about it then. I've never seen her since. She is an altogether impossible person, only to be tolerated in a crowd."

"There is the gong, thank goodness! Did Monica come in with you?"

"Yes. Monica has improved, mother, but it is a bit of a shock to find her so grown up."

"She is very childish in some respects yet and inclined to be bizarre. She will need a lot of toning down. She is a lonely creature who does not make friends easily. I confess she is a bit of a problem."

"Would you mind if I took her back to the Straits Settlements with me? It is quite healthy where I am, excepting for two months in the year, then I could send her elsewhere."

"It is a matter for discussion in the future. We needn't crowd everything into the first hours of your home-coming," she said as she rose. "Meantime, come and eat, and try to tell us something interesting about your experiences. We have nothing to tell you that could interest you."

He could have contradicted that, but he had already received sufficient information of different sorts to keep his mind engrossed for the rest of the day. After lunch he went out with Monica and the dogs for a ramble through the fields, and they had much more intimate talk which brought them nearer to one another. Monica was in no way averse to talking about the Herons, who seemed to interest her brother more than any other subject. She also was rather vague about them, though she had a certain clear impression about Beatrice.

"I saw her the day she came out to Mr. Heron's funeral, Johnnie. She's quite beautiful in a remote, stately sort of way. She sort of makes you crinkle up, and yet I'm sure if one knew her intimately it would be to discover something lovely inside. I'm sure it's there. Interesting she is, Johnnie, but most dreadfully difficult to know. I've been thinking something."

"What's that, wee wifie?"

"Couldn't we go together some day while you are home and call on the Herons at Trinity?"

"I should like that very much, but when could we time it? If Miss Heron is at business all day and there is no way of getting there on Sunday——"

"Besides, you only call on intimates on Sundays," Monica reminded him. "Why not Saturday? She would have a half holiday. Everything closes up at one on Saturday in Edinburgh."

"Very well, you and I will go to town on Saturday and lunch somewhere, and go out to Trinity in the afternoon."

Monica was delighted with the idea, but something happened before Saturday which enabled John Brodie and Beatrice Heron to meet.

He went to town next day to have an interview with the lawyers, whose offices were on the north side of the city. Walking across George Street in a slanting direction he suddenly was confronted by the brass plate of Madame Theodore, and remembered its association with Beatrice Heron.

After his interview with the lawyers, which was not very satisfactory, for they did not give away the whole of his mother's affairs to him, he walked back in the same direction and stopped, by some impulse for which he could not account, before the brass plate which had arrested his notice before.

Forgetting that he had not yet lunched, although it was half-past one, he quite deliberately entered the doorway and ascended the stairs to the first floor, where the entrance to the spacious premises was to be found. A small commissionaire in buttons received him politely, and appeared to be the only living creature on the premises.

"Miss Heron, sir? Yes, sir, she's in, please step into the waiting-room," said the boy, and John was ushered across the soft pile of the French-grey carpet, through a white door into a small waiting-room, hung in rose-red damask, a dainty boudoir to which only special customers were admitted.

Brodie did not look at home there; it was very small, only about ten feet square, and had enough mirrors in it to embarrass a mere man.

He stood by the small buhl table rather awkwardly for about five minutes, until the door opened to admit a tall, slight figure in a sweeping gown of unrelieved black,

her face wearing a look of expectant surprise. It was very seldom indeed that a man penetrated to the inner recesses of the fashionable dressmaker's establishment. Sometimes one, bolder than another, drifted in with some feminine possession, ostensibly for the purpose of advising, but more often to grant permission for further expenditure. Beatrice Heron had never met Compton Brodie's son, and she had no thought of him in her mind as, bowing slightly, she waited with a look of expectant inquiry to hear his business. When the boy came to tell her a gentleman wanted to see her, she concluded it must be a representative of some business house with which Madame Theodore dealt, and hearing she was not at home, had asked to see her representative.

She liked the look of the stranger, but he had none of the suave, slightly overdressed sleekness of some she had seen there : a rugged, plain man he appeared to be, with a suggestion of power and assurance if only in the making, and kind, deep sad eyes. All these outstanding characteristics of John Brodie Beatrice noted before she was electrified by his name.

"I am sorry that Madame, my principal, has gone out to lunch. If you can wait she will be back about ten minutes past two."

"I have come to see you," he answered simply. "I am John Brodie."

He saw a quiver cross her face, and her hand involuntarily went out and rested on the lintel of the half-open door.

"John Brodie!" she repeated mechanically. "But why?"

"I only returned to Scotland yesterday. It is imperative that we have some talk together over matters which affect both our families."

Beatrice could not altogether hide the hostility which any mention of the name of Brodie never failed to conjure into her eyes.

"I know of no reason why we should talk," she said clearly and very coldly. Her poise returned; she was Beatrice Heron, not on the defensive merely, as she had often had to be during the strange weeks she had

spent in the dressmaker's salons, but distinctly on the offensive.

Never had she merited more completely Jimmy Grier's description of her as a Polar star. But John Brodie stood his ground, not dismayed, not even repelled. This material was far more easily handled than the shallow stuff of which his mother was made. He had no fear at all of Beatrice Heron, but only an overmastering desire to know her better.

"But I know of many," he said simply. "We cannot talk here. Can I come later and go with you to your home?"

"No," she answered quite as clearly, and even more decisively. "I can't permit that; besides, there is no place in it where it would be possible to talk. It is a very little house, entirely filled with people."

"Then here?"

"No, pardon me. I am merely an apprentice here, and my principal does not permit visitors in business hours."

"Then will you meet me outside—we could talk in the open. I will come back for you at any hour you may name."

Beatrice seemed to ponder a moment. Her eyes were slightly less hostile, but she could not by any stretch of the imagination be described as cordial. "I don't really see what end can be served by our meeting or talking. All the talk in the world will never dispose of facts," she added passionately.

"Not dispose of them, perhaps, but make them more amenable to handling," he said, his deep, somewhat harsh voice softened into a tenderness which no woman save his little sister had ever heard.

Brodie was in no sense a woman's man, in fact the absence of sentiment in him had frequently been commented on by women who had tried to discover and exploit it. They had had to give him up in despair, labelling him a bit of Scotch granite, whereas his sentiment was so deeply interwoven with the fibre of his being, was so integrally a part of his consciousness, that he had to stand guard over it, as it were, lest by any chance it should play him irretrievable tricks.

It was struggling in him now, an immense and overwhelming compassion, which made him long to clasp this stricken, proud, suffering woman in his arms, and bear her away into some sunshine of his own creating.

Yes, even in that first moment of meeting, John Brodie knew that he had met his mate, the woman ordained for him since the beginning of time.

"I don't see it, and I know of no place where we can meet," she said steadily, but perhaps her voice was just a shade less cold, her expression a shade less forbidding.

"Let me find one. Allow me to come back at four o'clock."

"Four o'clock is still business hours."

"When do you close, then?"

"Not until six."

He seemed to ponder a moment on the hours he would have to put in before that one arrived.

She spoke then, as if visited with some misgiving.

"I am not so very strictly bound here. I have the good fortune to have a friend in my employer. If you come back at four o'clock either I will be ready to go out with you, or something else will have occurred to—to render our talk possible."

"Thank you," said Brodie, a trifle formally. "I am grateful for your concession, and I will not detain you now."

It was all very formal, and with a slight bow in token of farewell he made as if to walk out of the little womanish place, which somehow his presence seemed to dwarf. She stood aside to let him pass, and he imagined that she drew in her skirts, lest by any chance one fold should touch him as he passed.

"Good afternoon, Miss Heron," he said, with his slightly melancholy smile.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Brodie," she answered, but summoned no smile to challenge his.

But when the door closed upon him she felt suddenly weak, her heart fluttering with some new, strange emotion she could not describe.

She knew by the wind of the spirit which warns fine

natures of coming events, that a new chapter of experience was about to be opened in her life.

She had not sought this, there was nothing in the wide world she desired less than to discuss family affairs with Compton Brodie's son, and yet at the back of her mind there was a secret and growing sense of happy anticipation. Something in the man's unembroidered honesty appealed to her. She had looked in vain in him for what she called the Brodie strain.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Madame Theodore the moment she returned. "Has somebody been here saying nasty ones to you again?"

The question was justified. In the salon under Madame Theodore's supervision Beatrice had stood by to learn the mysteries of her trade, she had had to encounter old acquaintances, astonished, slightly supercilious some of them, and very few to strike the right note where she was concerned. Beatrice Heron's action had occasioned far more talk in certain exclusive Edinburgh circles, especially those connected with the law, than she had any idea of. She shirked nothing, however. One day, when the experience had been more poignant than usual, Madame Theodore had insisted that she must keep out of the showroom and exercise her faculties elsewhere.

But Beatrice had remained firm.

"Not at all, dear Madame. Having put my hand to the plough I'm not turning back. They don't hurt me, that is, not very much. It is only my struggle with the unbusiness-like desire to ask them to hold their tongues which worries me. It is getting easier every day."

Loving her dearly, and therefore sensitive to every change in the girl's mood, Madame immediately decided that some thoughtless tongue had wounded her afresh.

"It isn't anything of that kind, Madame, you know people don't come in the luncheon hour, excepting by appointment. I've had a visitor, however. Could you guess who he was?"

"A man? No—I couldn't possibly."

"John Brodie."

"You mean the son of the Mr. Brodie who died?"

Beatrice nodded.

"I don't remember hearing of a son; where has he been all this time?"

"Abroad somewhere. I have never heard exactly what he is doing. He came to see me about what he called our family affairs. I told him I knew of none concerning my family which it was necessary to discuss with him."

"Wha daur meddle wi' me?" quoted Madame, with a small, dry smile about her shrewd old lips. "And did that effectually scotch Mr. John Brodie?"

"Not at all—he simply stood and said he must see me. He said he would come at six o'clock and take me home, and finally he said he would come at four and take me out. I told him it couldn't be done in business hours, but he said he would take his chance."

"I like his pluck, and you'll go out with him, my dear."

"I don't know. Do you think I should?"

"I would need to see the man," said Madame cautiously. "Did you like the looks of him?"

Beatrice said neither yea nor nay, and her questioner did not pursue the subject.

"It might be worth while. You might learn something from him, and anyway, I like the idea of his wanting to discuss things with you. So you'll go, my dear, you can easily be spared. I must go and get off my hat. Monsieur Dubois was very amusing to-day; you speak French, I think?"

"Oh yes, very fair French."

"Then you'll interview him to-morrow about the summer models. He's coming at half-past ten. I told him I'd turn him over to you. He's immensely interested in you."

What Madame did not tell was the glowing tribute she had paid to the woman she called her young partner in speaking to one of the most distinguished of the group of Paris artists who decide the fashions of Europe. He had not come especially on business to Edinburgh, but to see a daughter who had married a Scotsman. Madame Theodore and he were old friends through many visit

she had paid to Paris, and they had discussed a little business over luncheon with most satisfactory results.

Madame Theodore retired up to her own room above the salon, and as she removed her hat her face indicated that she was deep in thought. It was not, however, her business talk with Monsieur Dubois that engrossed her, but something very different, and which, judging from the dreamy, half-smiling look in her eyes, was of a nature wholly pleasant.

CHAPTER XIII

WHEN, on the stroke of four o'clock, John Brodie swung across the clean, wide sweep of George Street to Madame Theodore's doorway, he was astounded to be met there by Miss Heron in her outdoor dress. He lifted his hat with a gesture of humble courtesy which immediately took the edge off a certain self-consciousness which had greatly troubled Beatrice.

She was very virginal towards men, the only ones she knew intimately having been her father and brother and Donald Grier. Very few had found their way to the little house at Trinity, the elements there being too mixed to permit of a very intimate circle. Lotta's intimates did not feel at home with what they called her "ready-made family," and the people whom the Herons used to know had fallen away like the majority of fair-weather friends. When you step out of the ranks it is amazing how quickly they close up, leaving little trace save perhaps here and there a shade of regret in some faithful heart. The Herons had tasted the common lot without making any plaint.

"This is very good of you," said Brodie, without any fuss, but with a sincere note of satisfaction which found its way immediately to the girl's heart. "What would you like to do? Shall we walk for a little while? It is a beautiful afternoon."

"There are only the streets, unless we go down to the Princes Street Gardens."

"We could do that—I had thought of it, but I have a better plan, if you will agree. May I ask first whether you are released for the day?"

"I can be. I think I mentioned that Madame Theodore is very good to me."

"Could she help it?" swept involuntarily through

Brodie's lips, though he was trying to steel himself against the personal note entering into this strange and perhaps poignant interview.

Beatrice made no answer, but averted her eyes from his face.

"It is now five minutes past four. If you will honour me by taking a cup of tea with me, we can get it at the hotel in the square yonder. I have already secured a place where we can talk undisturbed. Then afterwards, if you will permit it, I will walk with you at least part of the way home."

"That plan will do as well as any other, but I usually go home on the tram-car, or as far as it takes me," she answered.

They turned west together towards the wide, beautiful square at the extreme end of Princes Street, and passed inside the portals of the exclusive family hotel which Beatrice knew well by repute.

She was surprised to be taken upstairs at once to a private sitting-room, where a small, cheerful wood fire blazed, and a tea-table had been spread. There were even flowers upon it. John Brodie had been at great pains to make the setting worthy of the occasion.

Not understanding how Beatrice was fighting against any possibility of succumbing to this fine consideration, he closed the door and drew up the most comfortable chair the room contained. Beatrice sat down and began to draw off her gloves; had he been observing a little more closely he might have seen that her hands were less steady than usual.

He sat down opposite to her and began to talk at once, realising, with the intuition which had made him a success as a public servant, that she expected it, and it would perhaps be the best way of establishing the friendly relation he now so greatly desired between them. That she was not friendly yet he was fully aware, and he had just sufficient of the Scot's delight in obstacles to be determined to abolish this one.

"It is difficult to begin, I can only plunge," he said, with a little touch of naïveté which was almost boyish. "First, let me tell you that I was left to learn from

English newspapers in the club at Singapore how my father died."

Beatrice looked inexpressibly shocked. She had sampled some of the newspaper comments on the whole tragic business, and she could picture, even share the feelings Brodie was trying to describe.

"But I don't understand, didn't they write to prepare you, and give you full particulars—from Linnorie, I mean?"

"There was not time, I was summoned by cable. A few things had to be set in order before I could get my leave, and in the interval of course cables had arrived, and at least one Scotch newspaper."

"It was horrible for you, but it had one advantage, you were not on the spot, here, where it happened—we had to live through it."

"I understand that, and, believe me, I don't find it easy to express my sympathy. Naturally I feel some responsibility."

"You need not," she said quickly, for her sense of justice was very strong, a most essential part of her character. "It would be foolish and unnecessary for you to burden yourself with that. How many years have you been out of Scotland?"

"Five and a half."

"Well, see how completely they absolve you!"

"Of material responsibility perhaps, but there is the moral one, the one which I understand has been the prime factor in placing you where I found you to-day."

She said neither yea nor nay, her eyes looking out through the nearest window saw nothing, their vision being turned in on the soul.

"We will leave the dead," he said very gently. "Our concern is with the living. The only thing that gave me courage to seek you to-day was because though we had never met, what they told me about you made me understand that you take the same view of this tragedy as I do."

"Who spoke to you about me?" she asked sharply, bringing her eyes back.

"My sister Monica."

"What did she say about me? I ask because it

interests me. I have never confided to anyone my reasons for what I have done."

"But I have struck the right one," he suggested, and when she did not dissent he continued by another question.

"You have met Monica, I think?"

"Only very casually at Mrs. Brodie's garden party. I hardly remember her."

"She remembers you, evidently. You made a deep impression on her. Monica is troubled as I am about what we find here. We are questioning why everything goes on at Linnorie as it did before."

"A great many people have questioned that," said Beatrice quickly. "They have even questioned me in the fitting-rooms at Madame Theodore's."

"And have you had any explanation to offer?"

"I do not offer explanations. It is not necessary. These vulgar questioners should be treated with contempt. I treat them like that. They do not question a second time."

It was Beatrice at her worst who spoke, her features set as in a marble mask, her eyes dark and stormy, her brows knit between them, and her voice taking on a cutting edge. But Brodie was not repelled, because he sensed the poignancy of the suffering underlying it all.

"May I ask what opinion you have yourself formed about it?"

"There is only one," she said, and her voice did not falter. "Mr. Brodie must have safeguarded his own. Three months have elapsed, and nothing has been done even to attempt reparation."

It was a poignant moment for Brodie, and he squared his shoulders to meet it. How was he to justify or explain the situation to this coldly hostile woman without bringing a terrible indictment against his mother, into whose colossal selfishness had entered no quality of mercy nor desire to atone?

"I should like to explain to you," he said taking a roundabout way to approach the main issue, "that for some reason or another my father and I never understood one another. It is like that with some fathers and sons, and the loss is irreparable on both sides. I was

in complete ignorance of all my father's business and professional affairs. He never discussed nor included me in them. But I will confess to you that when I arrived at an age when I could grasp things, I was disturbed by his quick prosperity. It was one of the reasons which drove me to accept the appointment which came in my way when my University career was ended. I see now that it was a mistake. Perhaps if I had remained in Edinburgh and joined my father in business, it might have been different."

"There is no use going back on old scores," said Beatrice, and her voice had distinctly softened. "It leads nowhere. Poor human beings need pity—divine compassion—I think, because in life there are too few signposts, and searching for them, mostly in the dark, it is hardly to be wondered at if occasionally one misses the way."

Brodie was comforted by her tone and words, taking from them even some compassion for his father's memory.

"I did not care for the law," he pursued believing that she was now really interested, "and still less for finance."

"Have you found something you do care about, then?"

"I think so—administration is my job. It is likely I shall stay in the diplomatic service, although I don't expect to achieve any great distinction there, I know that I can do a bit of solid consolidating work behind the scenes."

Interested in spite of herself, Beatrice was tempted to forget what she had considered and proclaimed to be a fathomless unbridgeable gulf between her and all bearing the name of Brodie. She had indeed in her secret soul registered and maintained a kind of vendetta against the name, attributing to it all the disaster and shame which had brought their own down to the dust.

"I am glad to hear that," she said sincerely enough, and just then they were disturbed by a waiter bringing in the tea-tray.

Brodie sprang up, and when the things had been set on the table asked her to preside. Most women look well presiding at a tea-table; there is something womanly

and winning in the office. Beatrice Heron with face softly flushed by inner tremors, with no reason for refusal, though still fighting against this new compelling force that had entered her life, took her place and dispensed tea to him she had called in her secret soul her enemy. But he was such a kind, disarming enemy, and knocking so hard and insistently at the door of her heart !

It was a beautiful meal, and it comforted them both. Somehow the more poignant issues retired into the background, and Brodie told her things about his life abroad, interesting and wonderful things which opened her insular eyes. Of late years she had had too few opportunities of meeting interesting people—the Heron circle had gradually and inexorably narrowed until it became oddly vicious, in the sense that it represented no growth nor gracious fusion with contributory elements which enrich life.

All the while he was watching her keenly, and with a deepening of personal interest which astounded himself. Never before had he cared what impression he made on any woman, he had walked immune from feminine influence as virginal towards the other sex as Beatrice herself.

He was desperately anxious to impress Beatrice Heron favourably, to enlist her sympathy, her co-operation, and the moment they withdrew from the table he returned to the subject.

“ I hope the way has been paved for what I want to say,” he began, and Beatrice’s eyes, faintly startled, met his for a moment, and then were as quickly withdrawn.

“ You have said quite a number of things,” she replied with a slightly ironical touch, “ surely there cannot be many left to say ? ”

“ Oh yes, there are innumerable things left. Will you answer me a question truly ? ”

“ How can I say till I hear the question ? ”

“ I will advance a supposition then instead ; you feel yourself in some measure responsible towards the sufferers through the disaster in which both our families were involved ? ”

Beatrice made no answer, but her expression indicated that she resented the assumption.

"I do not wish to speak about it ; it can do no possible good."

"It might, for I happen to hold the same view regarding my own responsibility."

Still she did not speak, and her hands worked nervously together on her lap. She wished desperately she had not come. She could not imagine how she had ever permitted herself to be led into this impasse. As she was casting about for some loophole of escape Brodie went on calmly :

"I spent this morning partly with the lawyers who have my mother's affairs in hand, and partly with the firm associated with the liquidation of my father's affairs. From the latter I learned that when everything is wound up two shillings in the pound will be paid to the shareholders."

"And what will happen to the small investors, the single women and widows ; there are a good many, I understand, who trusted the firm because of the old name ? "

"There will be many cases of extreme hardship. I am investigating them and I will do my best to help. I will set aside the greater part of my income to relieve the most necessitous cases. I have made one or two good investments in the Straits Settlements, and every penny accruing from them will be dedicated to this purpose."

Relief leaped in her eyes and for the first time they really softened.

"It is very good of you," she murmured confusedly without looking at him.

"It is not a question of goodness but of justice and equity. My father settled certain moneys on my mother and sister some years ago, but I want you to know that I have never taken a penny from my father since I left his house, nor is there anything accruing to me from his estate."

Again her eyes softened and a little sigh that was half a sob quivered from her lips.

"I spoke to my mother about Linnorie this morning,

and she wishes to leave it. She wants to sell it—but—but——”

“ But what ? ” asked Beatrice interested at last.

“ I don’t want her to sell it.”

“ You like Linnorie, then ? ”

“ I have not had the chance to like or dislike it. I have lived at it so little. It is very beautiful, an old family house which seems to haunt one with reproach somehow. May I tell you what is in my mind about Linnorie at the moment ? ”

“ If you will.”

“ My mother will go back to the South Coast or she may travel with my sister abroad, probably the latter. I have suggested to her that she lets the house furnished on a short lease say three or five years.”

“ Why ? If Mrs. Brodie dislikes the place would it not be better to sell ? ”

“ I have a private reason for not wishing to dispose of it just now. I think I am going to persuade her that all moneys accruing from the estate should be devoted to the purpose you and I have at heart.”

“ It would help—it would help tremendously, but you make me jealous. My poor little effort and ambition ! ” Her eyes filled with tears that had a bitter sting in them. Brodie took a step nearer to her, his deep eyes very fixed and earnest.

“ Can’t you give me the benefit both of the doubt and the opportunity. My debt is greater than yours, because I am the son of the man who betrayed the trust of these innocent and helpless people ; your father was not even an accessory.”

“ Your mother thinks he was ; she spoke very bitterly about it that dreadful day I went with my father to Linnorie. He could not forget her words. I think myself that they broke his heart.”

There was a moment’s profound silence.

“ I wonder if you know just how I feel about what you are doing ? It may be noble, judged from your standpoint, but from mine it is intolerable. Won’t you give it up and go home and wait for better things ? ”

“ No,” she answered very clearly, “ because without

individual effort there can be no better things; and please don't be so scornful of my new occupation," she added with a ghost of a smile. "What will you say when I tell you that Madame Theodore has made a snug fortune of twenty thousand pounds in about twenty years?"

"Has she indeed?"

"Yes, and I will tell you, too, though no one else in the whole world knows excepting we two, she is going to hand over this splendid concern to me as it stands, without charging a penny for goodwill, just as soon as I have learned the business. I shall begin to earn big money, big money, do you hear, Mr. Brodie, every penny of which will go to the purpose we are discussing?"

She clasped her hands feverishly, her eyes shone with a restless eager light, her whole lithe young body seemed tense with feeling and resolve. It filled Brodie with nothing but a sadness and revolt too great to be uttered.

"You make me ashamed, and I don't know what to say, but at least let me hear that you will let me share in this just ambition. Together we might do big things, and in time clear the old name by paying twenty shillings in the pound instead of two."

Beatrice kept her eyes down bent, and appeared to be struggling with herself. She could not very well tell him candidly that she had registered a vow to be done with the Brodies, and all connected with them. This was an entirely new kind of Brodie, but she did not yield easily. Pride and an outraged sense of unfairness still soured the milk of human kindness in her, so that she could not meet him on equal ground.

"It sounds wonderful, but I'm afraid! I am not buoyed on the wings of too much hope," she said as she rose fastening her gloves. "Now I really must go; thank you very much for taking the trouble to explain certain things to me, more especially about yourself."

His faced flushed slightly. "I am glad to hear even one kind word from your lips. Since four, no, since half-past one o'clock to-day I have wished to stand well with you."

"How strange! I can do so little for any one, and I

do not have many friends. I don't make them easily you see."

"You are permitting me to walk part of the way home with you, I hope?"

She consulted her watch and shook her head. "No, it will soon be six o'clock. I must go by tram as quickly as possible."

"But you will allow me to see you again before I leave England?"

"You will not be leaving soon, surely, as you have only just arrived."

"It is not the usual leave, but a special one, and no advantage must be taken. The probability is that I shall be leaving England again under a fortnight."

"It is a long way to come for a fortnight," she murmured beginning to move towards the door.

"I have found it worth while, and it was certainly urgently necessary. When can I see you again?"

"It is impossible to say," Beatrice answered, and some strange flutter at her heart gave a shrinking coldness to her voice. "I am a busy woman now, and no doubt you will be much occupied as your stay is to be so short."

"But you won't turn me down, Miss Heron? Is there any reason why we should not be friends?"

"Until to-day I thought there was every reason," she forced herself to answer. "I don't think it would be well for us to meet often, but——"

She seemed to hesitate, but unaware of what she wished to say he could not help her.

"I shall be glad to hear after you go back to Singapore how the reparation scheme is progressing. I shall be working at it here."

It amounted to a pact, and Brodie's sombre eyes brightened; but though she did not refuse her hand when he held out his, her touch was light, even grudging, and when they reached the street she said good-bye in a quick staccato voice and walked rapidly away without once looking back.

CHAPTER XIV

It was a fine dry evening, though cold, and Beatrice, shrinking from the near proximity of fellow passengers inside the tram-car, and the casual stolid stare of strangers, or the effusive greeting of some chance acquaintance, climbed to the top and took a seat at the very front so that she could look straight ahead into space, no obstacle intervening. It was a very clear and lovely space, and the prospect one which gave her a sense of illimitable distance.

Beatrice, who intensely loved the grey old city which can bind hearts to it in unbreakable bonds, found herself less responsive to its beauty than usual. Her thoughts were entirely engrossed by the new human element which had that day entered her life. It was a disturbing element, though oddly comforting. Nature and circumstances had conspired to set Beatrice Heron apart in a kind of peculiar isolation. It was not pride, for at heart she was a humble person, but others had long since tacked the adjective, proud, to her name, and she had very few friends; no intimate ones at all excepting the Griers and Madame Theodore.

The few men who came very occasionally to the house at Trinity, chiefly friends of Lotta's, had no use at all for her elder stepdaughter. Some of them even went so far as to sympathise with Lotta because she had to live under the same roof with her.

Such deep, still, inarticulate natures demand our sympathy and compassion even when we do not understand them and wish they were more human and approachable. They suffer from the defects of their quality more keenly than we know. With the best intentions, often with the passionate desire to approach life more easily and cheerfully, they do not seem able to

achieve it. Beatrice that night suddenly became conscious of the intense loneliness of her soul, and of her existence.

Something in John Brodie's strength, the lure of his offered comradeship, had awakened in her heart a strange slow passion which surprised and disquieted her.

It gave her food for thought all the way home, and when she descended at the car terminus, and addressed herself to the short walk which would bring her home, she was surprised at the quick flight of time. She had no temptation to tell her afternoon's experience at home; subconsciously she was aware of a growing detachment from the order of life which had been adopted by her stepmother, and of which Ida had become a part. The boarding-house was now in being, and two strange men had taken up their abode in "The Outlook," and professed themselves well pleased with their quarters. Both were middle-aged bachelors, friends of Lotta's, one named Tom Meikle, head clerk in the insurance office where Lotta had worked before her marriage, and the other a German named Gustav Weile, a partner in a firm of Leith shipowners having large interests in Germany.

Beatrice, while loathing and resenting their admission to the family circle, did her utmost to be civil to them. She had no personal animus against Meikle, a bald-headed fatuous man, with a passion for anecdotes and an imagination that he told them rather well; but Weile she very heartily loathed, from his somewhat guttural tongue to the tips of his shiny patent leather boots. That he was very well off and willing to pay handsomely for accommodation in what he called an English home, did not in any way disarm her.

As she entered the little cul-de-sac where "The Outlook" stood she saw Gustav Weile letting himself in at the gate, and to her intense annoyance he opened it wide and stood waiting for her, lifting his grey felt hat with a sweeping bow as she approached.

He was very good looking with quantities of fair hair, and a waxed moustache trained with points upward in the fashion which has been more caricatured possibly than any other.

A dandy in his clothes he imagined himself irresistible. Holding the Teutonic idea regarding women, Miss Heron's aloofness had both piqued and interested, but in no way repelled him. Totally incapable of judging or understanding her, he imagined that her coldness would be overcome in time, and he admired her intensely. His large blue eyes said so as she approached, with an eagerness he made no attempt to conceal. Beatrice's expression positively froze before his ingratiating smile.

"Good evening, Miss Heron. You are late to-night, surely. Generally you get home before I do."

"Am I late? I don't know, Mr. Weile, but it is a matter of no consequence."

"Ah, do not say that, my dear young lady."

"I am not your dear young lady," snapped Beatrice, but Weile merely smiled with deepening intensity. He so seldom met cold looks in the women he honoured with his attention that he found Beatrice Heron's manner refreshing, suggestive perhaps of fresh fields to conquer.

"Ah! you desolate me, Miss Heron! Pray tell me how, where and when I have had the misfortune to displease you."

Beatrice's reply was merely a haughty glance, and passing rather quickly before him she entered the house. His expression changed to one of annoyance then, for his conceit was wounded. Even the welcoming smile of his landlady could not disarm him. Lotta admired him intensely, and both his looks, money and position. The smell of the late dinner, which was now the order of the day, filled the whole of the little house, and Beatrice, expected to make some little change for the table, went quickly upstairs, all her senses tingling and revolting. She did not see Ida until when about twenty minutes later, in response to the sound of the gong, she descended to the dining-room and took her place at the bottom of the table.

Weile and Meikle sat on either side of their hostess. Ida next to Meikle, and there was a space for another chair on Beatrice's left hand. Lotta often made a joke about it, and said she was looking for somebody to fill it.

The meal was good, because Lotta was far too shrewd.

a woman to neglect that all-important part of her duty as hostess.

Lizzie had been persuaded to remain, and now dressed in a very smart cap and apron, waited on the table.

"You're very quiet to-night, Mr. Weile," said Lotta, pronouncing the name as if it were the Scotch Wylie, "business worries, I suppose?"

"It might be," he answered a trifle ungraciously. "Never mind my silence, Mrs. Heron, Mr. Meikle will oblige with one of his anecdotes, I am sure."

"Not me," said Meikle, with a queer jerk in his voice, "I haven't had a new one for ages. Thinking of taking to inventing them. Think I'd make a good novelist, Miss Heron?"

Beatrice smiled across the table at him. She had no objections at all to Meikle, "a very harmless person, who left no impression on any intelligent mind," would have been her summing up. And it was better to hear him telling the old anecdotes than to listen to Gustav Weile.

"You tell the old stories so well, Mr. Meikle, you give quite a fresh impression of them," she said so kindly that the impressionable Meikle blushed like a schoolgirl. He secretly admired the elder Miss Heron tremendously, as one might admire the beauty of an inaccessible star. This little touch of personal kindness from her warmed his heart; while Weile, with his eyes on his plate, looked glum. He, too, admired Miss Heron, and in his pompous laborious way had striven to impress her, but without avail. She never voluntarily addressed him, and in reality resented his presence in the house. That he was Lotta's favourite boarder regarding whom she suffered no adverse criticism did not make it any easier for Beatrice. She strove to see as little of him as possible, and very seldom joined what Lotta called the family circle in the little drawing-room after dinner. This was a cause of offence to Mrs. Heron, which Beatrice, however, found herself unable to remove. She would sit for a few minutes then retire to her own little sanctum near the stars, happier there with her books and her memories of better days. Lotta was always respectful to Mr. Weile, and listened to his comments on men and things with

great deference. He could talk quite interestingly, and his business gave him knowledge of far lands and the men who came from them.

While his chief interests were in ships plying between Leith and German or Dutch ports, there were others, which sailed farther away bringing merchandise from sunny and tropical lands with which he seemed to have intimate acquaintance. Once when Beatrice commented on his wide knowledge of different countries he smiled his expansive yet slightly sinister smile down the table.

"Ah, my dear lady, it is necessary for progress that some should make study of conditions in other lands. The stay-at-homes are very insular. If they had their way the world and civilisation would stand still. Have you no desire to travel?"

"Oh yes," Beatrice admitted. "There is nothing I should like better, but it is not likely that I shall ever have either means or opportunity."

At that remark Weile had flashed what was meant to be a significant look into her eyes. "Both will come, Miss Heron. Nothing is surer than that."

In the little silence which ensued on her remark to Meikle about his story-telling, Beatrice suddenly addressed the German. It was so unusual for her to do this, that almost involuntarily they all appeared surprised.

"I suppose in your travels you have visited the Straits Settlements, Mr. Weile?"

A curious expression flitted across the man's face, and a close observer might have decided that it signified some inward perturbation.

"I have been there, of course, quite a bright jewel in the British Empire's crown," he said in bombastic tones.

"The climate is tropical, of course?" said Beatrice politely.

"Oh very, and it is very beautiful. Are you specially interested, then, in the Straits Settlements?"

"Not specially. I have met some one lately who has been there," she answered and immediately retired into

her shell again, but she was made aware that Weile was watching her rather more closely than usual, a fact which made her impatient to get away from the table. The two men usually remained together in the dining-room to drink their coffee, while the ladies went to wait for them in the adjoining room. Lotta who knew the ways of men and their likings did not forbid smoking in her presence, and had certainly been able at very little expenditure to create a home atmosphere for her boarders. She was quite a kindly person at heart, and when things were going according to her inclinations could be very amiable. She was really happier now than she had been in her husband's lifetime, for she had never understood him, and often found both him and the life she was compelled to live with him incredibly dull. She had neither sympathy with, nor understanding of the mentality of the Herons, as expressed in Beatrice and her father. Beatrice followed her stepmother and Ida into the drawing-room to wait for her coffee. Then she intended to go to her refuge upstairs to ponder on the event of the day which she shrank from communicating to them. What good would it do anyhow? It did not lead anywhere, nor had John Brodie and she arrived at a definite conclusion regarding anything. They had simply hailed one another as ships that pass in the night, though she was conscious of, and even disturbed by, a secret desire to see him again.

"Come in and shut the door, Bee," said Mrs. Heron lightly. "Have you got the hump? What is the use of nipping the face off poor Mr. Weile? I'm sure a nicer, more considerate gentleman never lived."

Beatrice slightly winced at her stepmother's use of the word gentleman. "I didn't snub him. I'm sure, Lotta, I try not to, but I don't like him and never shall," she answered quietly.

"You freeze him, any way, and that is just as bad; such a warm-hearted man, so fond of family life, and talking so nicely about the home he was brought up in in Germany. I hope you'll try and be civil to him, Bee, for he counts a lot here. Don't forget what he pays every week."

"I'll try not to," said Beatrice quietly, "but I can't help preferring Mr. Meikle."

"Oh, poor old Meikle, quite a good sort, but of course not in the same street with Mr. Weile, is he, Ida?"

Ida, idly strumming on the piano keys, merely remarked casually, "They're both quite nice, Lotta, and very kind; I'm sure we couldn't have been more fortunate."

Lizzie came in with the coffee tray from which the gentlemen had already helped themselves. Beatrice resented this, thinking Lotta made a mistake in not exacting the usual courtesies due to their sex, but she did not feel that she could even comment on it. She smiled into the girl's face as she filled her cup and was surprised to see that she looked sullen, her eyes slightly swollen as if she had been crying.

"Anything the matter with Lizzie?" she asked after the door was closed.

Mrs. Heron tossed her frizzled head rather angrily. "I had to give her a few words to-day for cheek, for something she said about my gentlemen. Lizzie's been spoiled, Bee; but if you leave her to me we'll get along all right. While we're on the subject of Lizzie, I've had the offer of a fresh boarder to-day."

"You refused him, I suppose, since there's nowhere you can put him."

"Well, I've been wondering," said Lotta calmly, "I gave up my room to Mr. Weile, I think you might be prepared to make a small sacrifice for the good of the house and to help when your father left us so badly off."

"What do you mean quite?" asked Beatrice, but her tone was not very encouraging.

"Well I thought we might put a double bed in Ida's room and let you share with her, or give me your den. I don't mind which, but it'll have to be one or the other, for he's coming in on Saturday."

Beatrice looked the dismay she felt, but before she could say anything her stepmother went on rapidly:

"He'll pay two guineas, same as Mr. Meikle, and with Mr. Weile's three we'd be quite comfortable. Two lodgers don't pay, but three would. This new one, a

friend of Mr. Weile's, just come over from Hamburg, would provide the margin, don't you see?"

Beatrice saw quite clearly and did not know what to say. She was only as yet paying a few shillings for her partial board, though she hoped soon to be in a position to increase them, and her stepmother was in a sense quite within her right. Ida continued striking odd chords, but listening intently for Beatrice's pronouncement on the subject, which she and Lotta had discussed at great length during the day.

"You look as if you were going to be nasty about it," said Lotta with an aggrieved note in her voice.

"Oh no," said Beatrice quickly. "I haven't the right to be that, and I hope I wouldn't be, anyhow. I quite see your point, but I think I'll put a bed in my den. If I cleared out all the old books and papers from the cupboard and put up some pegs I could make room for my clothes. Ida, don't you think that would be better? We should be inconveniently crowded in your wee room."

"A bed sitting-room, Bee? But you'd hate it. It's the limit."

"Not at all. It's what I think I'll do. I'll go up and have a look round." She rose rather hastily, fancying she heard a movement in the adjoining room, which was only removed from them by folding doors.

She escaped by the stairs just as the men came out of the dining-room, the fragrance of Weile's very fine cigar filling the whole house.

The attic chamber where Beatrice had often done dressmaking, where she kept her few most treasured books and dreamed her dreams, was invested with new interest, for her rapid survey suggested how the proposed alteration could be carried out without much personal discomfort. She felt very restless, and while the sound of voices and laughter came floating up the stairs she had no share in it at all.

Hastily putting a long coat over her soft black frock, which though high at the neck marked a difference between her working and her leisure hours, she stole downstairs, and in order that the opening of the front

door might not betray her, went out by way of the kitchen, where she found Lizzie taking her supper off some of the scraps left.

Mrs. Heron was not stingy, nor did she make Lizzie's life a burden with constant complaints and directions, but the girl's bright face was certainly clouded.

"What's the matter, Lizzie? Aren't you well?" asked Beatrice kindly, "or have you bad news from home?"

"Oh no, Miss Bee, it's just the mistress, and the folk here. I'm for nae mair o' thae Germans. I canna stand that Mr. Weile! An' because I said I wondered she would tak' anither intil the hoose, she oot at me like onything. I'm no stopping, Miss Bee. I telt her I'd be leaving at the term."

"Don't do that, Lizzie, we'd all miss you so much, and I've no doubt Mrs. Heron will get somebody to help you when we have another inmate of the house."

"Oh, I'm no mindin' the work if it was for oor ain kind o' folk, but there's something aboot that man I dinna like."

"Don't do anything in a hurry, Lizzie. I am hoping that some day I shall have a little house of my own and that you will come to be with me."

"Eh mighty, if I thocht that would ever happen, Miss Bee, I'd pit up wi' onything waitin' for it."

Beatrice smiled and nodded. "Don't be in a hurry, my dear. We'd miss you terribly; you've been such a kind friend to this house, and Miss Ida and I will never forget how much my father liked you."

This was sufficient to release a fresh flood of tears from Lizzie's eyes, though she was not what could be called an emotional person.

"If they ask after me, Lizzie," said Beatrice as she turned to go, "tell them I've gone down to the Manse for half an hour to see Mrs. Grier."

CHAPTER XV

ALISON GRIER had had a busy day washing and ironing, and at half-past eight o'clock, every child being in bed, and the minister gone to a meeting, she sat down at the study fire to address herself to a big pile of mending. Eleven pairs of stockings which the spring wind had dried in one afternoon awaited her attention, each with a hole in the toe or heel. But she was far too tired. The moment she dropped into the shabby old easy chair her eyes closed and she fell fast asleep.

Thus Beatrice Heron found her after having been admitted by a small elf-like creature whom Alison had rescued from a Stockbridge slum and was training in the way she should go. She was not much use yet, save to break and mar, but had in her the makings of good service. Devotion was her strong point. She would have gone through fire and what she called "watter" at the bidding of any person, large or small, in the Manse of Little Trinity.

"What have you been doing to-day, Alison?" asked Beatrice severely, when their first greeting had passed. "You look simply dead to the world."

"Washing," answered Mrs. Grier briefly. "And as there was a grand wind I put in two pairs of blankets. It's the wringing that worries me now, being in the sere and yellow. When Beenie Crockett is two years older, she'll take it over. She's making quite a good shape at it already, only her legs and arms are a bit short."

"She'll probably have deserted by then, having learned all you can teach her. It's a way they have," said Beatrice.

It was so unlike her to be discouraging that Alison regarded her attentively. "Had a bad day, dear?"

"A queer day. I've come to tell you about it. Mean-

while my gorge is rising over the German invasion of 'The Outlook.' Lotta had the coolness to ask me to turn out of my room to-night to make room for another one, a nephew or something of Gustav Weile's."

"He seems quite a nice man, excellent manners," said Alison, feebly protesting. "And of course in that kind of business, catering for people I mean, it's numbers that pay."

"That is what Lotta says, but I loathe it all the same, and it's no use pretending I don't."

"Well, what happened? Did you agree?"

"Oh, I'll have to; you see at the moment I'm not in a position to dictate at all. I'll simply put up a truckle bed of some kind in my den. I'm an unsociable beast, Alison, and Ida's untidiness worries me."

Alison said nothing, but looked sympathetic. As she was about to draw her mending basket towards her, Beatrice gently pushed her back and took up the thimble and the darning needle.

"I'll do that. Mechanical exercise is excellent for ragged nerves, and I'm a good darning. Sit back, old woman, and let me look at you."

Alison did not demur. She was quite glad to be idle, and it was not the first time she had sampled Beatrice Heron's practical help in affairs of the house and family.

"I loathe these men in the house, Alison, though poor little Meikle in his anecdotage is quite harmless. But I don't consort with them except under severe compulsion, occasionally for a few minutes at night. I must admit that Weile is a beautiful musician. He can lay you under a spell in about five minutes. You know how Ida loves music, but I'm afraid I don't at all like the atmosphere for her."

"But—but I think she's engaged to Jimmy," Alison blurted out.

Bee looked the extreme surprise she felt.

"Do you really think so? Very doubtful, I should think," she said, shaking her head.

"They've come to some kind of an understanding, because Jimmy as good as told me so. It was that

Saturday after your father's funeral. Do you remember them going for a walk away out Granton way ? ”

“ Of course I remember perfectly, but Ida never said a word.”

“ Neither did Jimmy for that matter, but I put two and two together and he dropped one or two hints, and went off to Glasgow as happy as a king.”

Beatrice sighed a little.

“ It would be lovely, and I hope it will come off, Alison, for Jimmy's a perfect dear, and he'll get on. It's only a question of time about his reputation. He's got the head of a genius ; ever noticed his resemblance to Burns ? ”

“ Oh, often. When I want to tease him I call him Bobby B., and he has turned out some quite pretty verses. I dare say he sends them to Ida in his letters.”

“ That *may* safeguard her then, but she's very susceptible you know, and I've caught Weile looking at her in a way which raised the very devil in me. You know how the Germans regard women.”

“ I was in a school there for a year,” said Alison demurely, “ so I know a good deal.”

“ Then there's the proximity. The man on the spot has the advantage every time ; but I didn't come to talk about Ida to-night, Alison, but to tell you something that happened to me to-day.”

Instantly Alison was all eyes and ears. She was intensely interested in her friend's experiment, though not as yet satisfied that it had in it the elements of success. She had cherished a kind of hero-worship for Beatrice Heron, and frequently deaved the minister with prognostications regarding her future, starting from the premise that she was by nature fitted to adorn any station, particularly the highest.

And it had been a “ downcome,” to use the homely Scots expression, to hear that she had voluntarily elected to convert herself into a dressmaker at the beck and call of whoever happened to have the full purse.

“ Tell me quick. You're always interesting, you know, Bee, whatever you talk about.”

"Am I, Ailie? I don't think that. I'm really a dull person; Lotta thinks I'm socially impossible."

"Oh, that! Well, never mind. Tell me what happened."

"I had a visit from John Brodie."

"John Brodie!" said Alison in a puzzled voice; "you mean old Compton Brodie's son?"

"Yes, the elder one who is out in the Straits Settlements filling some sort of administrative post."

"Well, what does he look like, and what did he want?"

"His looks are all right. He is the kind of man you would like, Ailie, no frills, very straight and sincere. I went out to tea with him at the Roxford Hotel."

"Mercy me, did you; what a condescension! He must have appealed to you somehow."

"It wasn't a question of that, I simply couldn't escape. He's a very quiet, determined kind of person, and he wanted to thresh out our liability for the catastrophe which has changed the world, for me at least."

"What are his views, then? I seem to have heard, though I couldn't tell you from what source, that he never got on well with his father, and that he took the first loophole of escape from Scotland."

"That is true. He told me that much, and he only learned from newspapers out there how his father died. You see, they only cabled, and he left before he could get particulars in a letter."

"It was rather awful for him! Does he seem to feel it?"

"Oh, yes; and he is going to make himself responsible for atonement."

"Rather fine, don't you think, Bee?"

Beatrice kept her eyes steadily on a very large hole in David Grier's stocking and made no answer for a full minute.

"We had a long talk over everything. He went into all kinds of details, and he thinks with me that it is a scandal that his mother should be going on at Linnorie exactly as if nothing had happened."

"She must live somewhere, poor thing," said Alison,

who had never met Mrs. Brodie. "And what does he suggest?"

"Oh, she's leaving Linnorie and Scotland. She was only waiting till her son came home. She wants to sell it."

"The only thing to do, obviously."

"But he doesn't want her to sell it—I can't think why, can you, Ailie?"

"No. He can't possibly have any associations such as you have with the place, and if he was not happy at home, a mere house where his people had lived for a while could not appeal to him."

"That's what I think, but of course I didn't encourage him to speak about it."

"But you listened, apparently, to what he had to say?"

"Oh, yes, it interested me up to a point. He wants to enter into a kind of partnership with me about this atonement business. He asked me point-blank my reasons for going into business, and when he heard them, proposed that we should co-operate to pay up the shareholders."

"Well, why not, it's a fine ideal, surely?"

"I don't want to do it, Alison," said Beatrice very firmly, and as her wool knotted at the moment she broke it off rather viciously. "Why can't he work away at his own share of the atonement business, and leave me to look after my father's memory? That's all that concerns me, really."

Alison said neither yea nor nay, but inwardly pondered on the unusual perturbation her friend was exhibiting, in spite of all her efforts to cover it up.

"It's awfully interesting any way you like to look at it, Beatrice. You and Compton Brodie's son! I just can't get over it! What is he like, good looking?"

"I suppose so, tall and serious looking. I'm rather sorry now that I went out to tea with him. It sort of opens the door to other things. I think I won't see him again."

Beatrice spoke in rather a low voice, with her eyes fixed on the fire.

"I see no reason why you shouldn't meet and talk over things, especially as you rather liked him."

"I want to be done with the name of Brodie, Alison," said Beatrice, and her eyes stirred stormily.

"Oh, but that sounds like visiting the sins of the fathers on the children, my dear. I'm sure you're far too honest and fair-minded a person to do that. Besides, I won't let you."

Beatrice's lips stirred in the faintest smile.

"I don't just see how you could prevent me, but he won't be here long. It's a special leave. He talks of leaving Scotland inside of a fortnight."

"It seems a long way to come for such a short time. Did he come from Singapore?"

"I didn't ask, but suppose that he did. Anyhow, he would have to come there to get his boat, wouldn't he? I'm very hazy about the Straits Settlements. I think I must read it all up in poor father's 'Chambers' Encyclopædia.'"

"Did you tell them at home?"

"No, and I don't think I will. Lotta has very little sense about people and I don't think it would interest Ida very much."

"You are an isolated creature, Bee. You remind me of Tennyson's maid whom the shepherd implored to come down from the mountain," said Alison. "You don't give yourself a chance. How is the business getting on?"

Alison did not very often ask because she knew that a good many snubs had been administered to the courageous young woman who had set aside and defied all the tenets of her own order, and plunged into the world of trade.

"The business is all right, and I'm getting to like it. Madame Theodore is quite pleased with my progress, and I believe she will retire even earlier than she intended."

"Will she leave the house?"

Beatrice visibly brightened at the question.

"Yes, I think she will, and what I would really like is to get Ida to come and keep house for me there, leaving Lotta to carry on her own boarding-house."

"I don't think she'll let Ida do that, dear. Of course a pretty girl like Ida is a great asset to the house."

Beatrice's colour slightly rose, and her proud mouth tightened.

"It's just because of that I want to get her away. I'm afraid of that crowd, Alison, and Ida is very susceptible to flattery, and has very little insight where men are concerned. Oh dear, oh dear, but life is a problem. I'm very tired of it. Sometimes I wish I'd never been born. To-day I wish it very particularly."

"Oh, cheer up, the worst is over, and to revert to poor young Brodie, don't nip him in the bud, Bee. If he's sensitive about his father's honour, you ought to understand him and sympathise with him. And anyhow, if he's leaving so soon he's not likely to encroach on you very often."

Beatrice said neither yea nor nay, but changed the subject with an abruptness which indicated that at the moment she desired it to be closed. She stayed for about half an hour, but declined to wait till the minister came in to see her home.

"He will be tired, Alison, and wouldn't thank you for tacking me on to him. Give him my love, and if you should be writing to Jimmy tell him to hurry up and come and take Ida away. That would make me so happy, I'd be able to offer a brighter face to my own trouble." She kissed Alison hastily, though not given to caresses, and her two bright tears did not escape Alison's notice. She was sitting knitting her brows over the remnant of the darning when her husband came in.

"How did you come, Don? Did you meet Beatrice?"

"No, I didn't come that way. Has she been here?"

"Yes, and all sorts of queer things are happening. Come and sit down. Mercy, how tired you look! Never mind, I've got something very nice keeping hot for you."

A little tray was spread on the end of the table, and a few steps to the kitchen brought the appetising morsel which, with a cup of delicious coffee, quickly caused Donald Grier to forget his weariness.

His wife's bright smile, the ready comradeship, never failed him, and though they had few assets besides their love for one another, and their children, there were

few happier or more care-free couples in the whole of Edinburgh.

"Now tell me about Beatrice," he said, as he drew in with a smile of real satisfaction to the table.

"Not till you've told me whether you made a good speech. Did you mind to leave out the bit I told you to leave out, and to put in the other bit?"

"I don't know. I'm not sure, but anyway, they seemed to like it, and we got a good collection, nine pounds. They said it was a record."

"Good! They might have sent you home in a cab to mark their sense of gratitude. Beatrice is worrying about a number of things, the boarding house first and foremost, and Ida being mixed up with its heterogeneous units. Mrs. Heron has asked her to give up her bedroom for a nephew of the German boarder."

"And is she going to do it?"

"Well, you see, she hasn't much choice, because she doesn't pay very much yet. But that wasn't what brought her to-night. It was to tell me she's had a visit from Compton Brodie's son."

"Has she indeed? Where did he come from, and what did he want?" asked the minister, without much show of interest.

"You're thinking of the effect you created at your meeting, Don, so I won't tell you yet. I'm unfastening your boots now. Who says I'm not a model wife?"

He stopped, and dropping his hand on her bright head, drew her to him for a moment.

"Bless you, Ailie, you're my lodestar, my sheet anchor, my everything."

"Oh, good! I didn't think I was so valuable. To-night I'm feeling particularly cheap. Do you think there will be any washing in Heaven, because if there is I shall go on strike."

A small spasm crossed the minister's grave lips. He hated to have her work so hard. Year by year expenses increased, and they were ambitious for their clever children, and there never was any margin nor likely to be one. Sometimes the future filled them with a kind of blank dismay.

Then again they had their bright days, when hope and vision lifted them up on the wings of desire and expectation far above sordid cares.

"Now, I do want to hear about Beatrice. Was she on a very high horse to-night?"

"Yes, a fiery, untamed steed where John Brodie was concerned, and yet I don't know! I seemed to detect a secret flutter of interest which she was terrified to acknowledge even to herself. I'd like to see him. He must be a very interesting man."

"In what way? Like his father at all?"

"No, no, not that sort at all. Serious-minded, Bee says, and determined to make reparation. He wants her to co-operate."

"How? He hasn't the right to ask for that, for poor old Mr. Heron was perfectly innocent."

"He wants it all the same. He's earning good money in a Government appointment out in the Malay States, and he is only here for a fortnight. Do you think a fortnight is long enough, Don?"

"Long enough for what?"

"Well, for Cupid to do a nice little bit of work."

Donald Grier put back his handsome head and laughed. He was very like his brother Jimmy in some ways, but on a larger scale altogether, with a head like a Viking, and masses of curly, dark hair which, being cut very short, gave his head a leonine appearance.

"What are you plotting now?"

"Nothing. Do you mind the first night you came to Carburn Manse?"

"Ay, fine."

"Well, wasn't the deed done that night?"

"It was. I made up my mind I'd marry you whether you would or not."

"Well, in a fortnight John Brodie might get that far, if he's a masterful man."

"But Beatrice Heron is a wonderful woman, she'll take a lot of courting, Ailie, and I'd not like to be the poor beggar, frankly, much as I like her."

Alison laughed in scorn.

"You're a mere infant in the office and affairs of love,

Donald Grier. The right man will open the door of Beatrice Heron's heart without the smallest trouble, and he'll find treasures there too, treasures rich and rare. I've got it all cut-and-dried, Don. They'll fall in love, together wipe off the reproach, and end in story-book fashion by going back together to live at Linnorie."

Donald Grier pushed back his chair and reached for his pipe.

"You're a very good wife, an excellent cook, Ailie, and a mother in a thousand, but I'm not sure whether you're not a better novelist spoiled in the making."

"Wait and see!" said Ailie, as she picked up the tray and vanished with it, laughing over her shoulder at him with all the coquetry and charm of long ago.

CHAPTER XVI

A WEEK passed away, but John Brodie did not call again at the business house of Madame Theodore. In spite of her brave protestations to Alison Grier and to herself, Beatrice was distinctly disappointed. A wistfulness crept into her eyes, she was conscious of an impulse to start with every knock or opening of the door. When the little messenger girl approached her about any trivial thing she listened with an air of expectancy out of proportion to the matter in hand.

Upon Madame Theodore these signs and portents were not lost. Beatrice had acquainted her in part with what had passed between her and Brodie at their memorable meeting and interview. The old woman had made even less comment than Alison, but drew her own conclusions and thought her own thoughts.

She, too, was disappointed that John Brodie made no second effort to see Beatrice, and over their afternoon tea on the eighth day she said bluntly :

"I suppose that Brodie man must have gone back to Singapore, as he has never looked near again. I'm afraid you snubbed him too effectively."

Beatrice flushed rather guiltily, for the same thought was troubling her.

"It is a matter of no consequence to me whether he comes back. There was no reason in the world why he should ever have come at all."

Once more it was Beatrice at her worst, but Theodora Duncan, Scotch to the backbone herself, merely smiled.

"It is a very prickly pear, my dear, but it will be very good to eat—some day."

Before Beatrice could challenge this remark the little messenger knocked at the door.

"Mr. Brodie has called, Miss, to see you."

Beatrice sprang up, flushing deeply. Madame rose more leisurely, brushing the crumbs from her silken lap.

"I'll send him up, you can't talk to him in the salon, and I don't suppose you wish to go out as you enjoyed yourself so little the last time."

"No, I won't go out. I don't want to see him at all," she said stormily.

"Oh, yes you do; at least, it is better you should see him, and you will give him tea here to equalise the tea he gave you at the Roxley. Then perhaps you'll get rid of the load on your mind," said Madame Theodore with a little twinkle in her eye. "You get out some shortbread from the tin. I'll tell Agnes Binnie to make some fresh tea as I go down. I'll bid him good-day and send him up."

The matter was taken out of Beatrice's hands, and though her eyes still protested, her lips said nothing.

Madame's high heels clattered down the stone stairs to the lower floor, and Beatrice was left in the pretty sitting-room which had two long windows looking down to the sea. Of all Madame Theodore's possessions Beatrice most coveted this sitting-room, with its absurd French furniture, picked up at odd times on her visits to Paris, and having no connection or kinship with the high-ceilinged, austere Edinburgh house. It had even been Frenchified with panels of red silk damask and painted Cupids on the ceiling. Madame Theodore in later years had regretted that transmogrification, but as it had cost her a great deal of money at a time when she had not so much to spare, she had let it stand. She had then been determined to introduce and keep the distinctive French flavour in her business, and when challenged by good-natured friends, had referred them to history, which showed that once the French and the Scots had been almost blood brothers. Were not scores of them buried in the old churchyard of Midlothian? If they were ignorant on that head, well, the loss was theirs, and she could give them directions to visit these Huguenot graves. All she was attempting to do was to keep memory green and strengthen ties which might yet help to buttress a shaking world.

Beatrice did not care for the room, but the view enchained her. She had visions, when it should be her own some day, of removing the French gilt and colour and restoring the grey Edinburgh flavour, picking up odd bits in the old shops, especially those to be found by the discerning in the mean streets clustering about the Castle. From that height a clear sweep could be had down to the Firth and "the beggar's mantle fringed with gold" on the other side.

On very clear days the huddled red and grey roofs of Fifeshire houses could be distinctly seen. It was a wonderful panorama, and often filled Beatrice Heron's soul with the joy and passion of love of country, a passion which has no real marrow on the face of the earth. Because of it, strong men in far-away places find their hearts melting within them at sight of a sprig of faded heather, or a morsel of tartan ribbon, their whole being prostrate in worship of the great little grey mother who bore and cradled them.

Agnes Binnie, a hunch-backed old maid, who was one of Madame Theodore's protégées, a fearsome person to most people because of her fiery temper, but an angel of goodness and perfect service to the favoured few, came in to remove the cups and set out a fresh one.

She favoured Miss Heron, who possessed that indefinable something which cannot be bought, but which, communicated by some subtle process of kindliness and understanding, knits the souls of those who serve to the served in bonds which death itself can hardly break. Beatrice, standing motionless in front of one of the long windows, did not so much as look round at Agnes Binnie as she tidied up the table.

Meanwhile, in the grey-and-pink salon downstairs which John Brodie's big presence seemed to dwarf, he was being greeted with quiet kindliness by Madame Theodore.

"Good day, Mr. Brodie. Miss Heron is upstairs. We were at tea. She'll see you upstairs, if you please. I left the door open."

"I'm to go up, then?" he said, eagerly. Recalling

the set face and stormy eyes she had left, Madame Theodore suddenly took something on herself.

"I suppose you know that Miss Heron and I are great friends, Mr. Brodie. Poor, dear lassie, she's been through a hard time. It's her nature to take things hardly."

"I have discerned that, Madame. It means more suffering for her which I would spare her if I could," he said, surprised into a frankness almost as foreign to him as it was to Beatrice.

"I see that; well don't be discouraged," said Madame eagerly, and with the same kindly gleam in her eyes. "There is one thing I would say if you'll permit me, there are none more capable of judging and appreciating a fine spirit or a generous act. I say it for your comfort, and if her face and manner are not always encouraging yet don't be discouraged. I've known her since she was a baby, and it's true what I'm telling you."

After he was gone with a brief word of thanks which gave no indication of what he really felt, Madame's expression became a little rueful, "Now I've put my foot in it more than likely. But Heaven, what a pair! Thistles are not in it! Well, they must dree their weird."

John Brodie took the shallow, well-worn stone steps of the outer stairs with a bound, and presented himself with a light knock at the open door. Agnes Binnie appeared, slightly ungracious, and ushered him into the French sitting-room where Beatrice awaited him. He approached eagerly extending his hand. Beatrice only offered him chill fingers, raging within because of the beating of her heart and the genuine strange thrill which the sight of his grave fine face caused her.

"I thought you had gone back to Singapore," she said stiffly, withdrawing her fingers quickly from his warm pressure.

"I am glad you honoured me with a thought at all. I would have written, but I've been very busy for a whole week collecting evidence."

Instantly her thoughts focussed on the matter which willy-nilly had made itself a common bond between them.

"Won't you sit down?" she said a trifle less stiffly.

"And there is tea; Madame Theodore ordered it for you," she added as if to dissociate herself from any participation in so simple an hospitality.

When he did not say anything she moved to the table and filling a cup handed it to him. He took it mechanically, chilled by the difference in her manner. It was as forbidding as it had been at the first moment of their meeting when he had hoped he had broken down the barriers and swept them away.

"Perhaps I ought to have written explaining what I was doing," he said lamely.

"But why? You were under no obligation to me at all, even if I had had any interest in your doings."

She did not know what devil prompted her to such unkindness. Brodie's lips hardened on the rim of the Sevres tea cup which Madame Theodore, in the face of many warnings, used every day in her French sitting-room.

"I am sorry," he said simply. "I thought I had interested you. Perhaps then you do not care to hear of the investigations I have been making since we met, into the needs of the sufferers through the Trust."

She sensed the difficulty he had in finding fitting words to describe their common shame. It melted her, and she lifted her eyes to his face.

"I am being horrid," she said simply as a child. "But it is a subject on which I find it difficult to think, much less to speak."

"Nevertheless that does not absolve us from both thinking and speaking. Have I your permission to sit down and tell you what I have been doing?"

She inclined her head, and indicating a chair for him, sat down herself. He, however, merely leaned against the carved end of the gilt settee, and, regarding her intently, began to speak.

"I got a list of the shareholders and I have called on every one I could reach, making several railway journeys for the purpose."

"In a week!" she said faintly. "But how wonderful! It is what I have often thought I would like to do, and would have to do some day. In a week—it is incredible!"

The rapidity of his actions and the practical way in which he had grasped the difficulties presented by his reparation scheme were a little overwhelming, and seemed to mark a wide gulf between the man's point of view and the woman's.

"I had no time to lose, had I?" he asked smiling slightly. "I am sailing again on the twenty-eighth of the month."

"That is next week," she said, and in spite of herself a faint edge of dismay sounded in her voice; but he did not notice it.

"It is. I travel to London by the night train on Thursday. But it is astonishing what can be crowded into a week of seven days when it is necessary. I have interviewed thirty-seven investors, and been in communication with other five whom I could not reach personally."

"How many are there altogether?"

"Forty-two; there were forty-five, but two died, one of shock over her loss, and the other, a delicate elderly man, took a sleeping draught from which he never awoke."

"Do you mean that he took it intentionally?" Beatrice's voice was halting and nervous, her eyes full of horror.

"I am afraid there is no doubt about it. He had nothing to look forward to, and was too ill to earn anything even if he could have got work. His malady would have got gradually worse until he became quite helpless. He chose the line of least resistance, and who are we to blame him?"

Beatrice's face blanched. There was something very merciless about his calm summing-up of the bitter harvest of wrong doing and mad speculation, yet not for a moment could she imagine him devoid of feeling. The very fact that he had steeled himself to make these ghastly investigations proved that something within was stronger and finer than his personal likes or dislikes. He, also, might so easily have taken the line of least resistance by remaining silent in the Malay States and leaving the dead past to bury its dead.

"Did this unfortunate man leave anyone?"

"His wife. I have arranged that she shall have enough to live upon. It is one of the saddest of the cases. Then there are two old ladies who live in the top flat of a house in Drummond Place. They were born in it, and hoped to die in it. They are in a state of great confusion of mind, and I have been able to relieve them. They can live on very little and I think must not be turned out of their house."

Beatrice rose hastily looking round vaguely, then pulled out a drawer of Madame's writing table and got a sheet of paper. "Please give me these names and addresses," she said, and though her tone sounded low and hard her lips were really trembling.

"The first is Mrs. Calder. They have a cottage at Juniper Green. She is to remain in it. I have forgotten the name of the house, but they have lived there a long time. It is a small place, and should you care to go out and see her the Post Office will direct you."

Beatrice obeyed the direction without committing herself regarding the future.

"And the two ladies in Drummond Place?"

"The Misses Kinloch. I think the number is ninety, but they, too, are well known in the district, where they have lived all their lives. The number of cases of what I might call acute distress is not very large, thank God. I have seen them all; shall we go on?"

Beatrice nodded, and he went on to describe the cases one by one, she making such notes as her impulse directed.

"There are quite a dozen people who are fairly well off, and who, while they have lost a substantial sum, are still not in any kind of distress. They must be considered later. I might tell you in passing that they are loudest in their complaints, and were the most unpleasant to deal with. Mrs. Calder and the Misses Kinloch and the Ballantynes, though he is a schoolmaster with a small salary and a lot of young children, were wonderfully kind and considerate. Ballantyne was only troubled because it was his wife's little nest egg they had been persuaded to invest in the mine hoping from the highly-coloured prospectus and the backing given by the firm

in which both our fathers' names appeared, that they might be able to send their boys to public schools in England. Mrs. Ballantyne being an English woman, this has made her very bitter against the Scotch, so you see what wheels are within wheels."

"It must have been very painful for you," said Beatrice with difficulty. "Painful and horrible!"

Brodie shrugged his shoulders and then squared them.

"It was no worse than I expected, and now I feel better. I have at least infused new hope into some despairing hearts, and promised relief to those who can wait."

"And what does this mean to you, financially I mean?"

Brodie seemed to hesitate a moment. "I am not a rich man, but as I think I mentioned before I made use of some financial opportunities, entirely legitimate ones, which offered themselves out there. They will provide for cases like the Mrs. Calder and the Kinlochs, and in a less degree for the Ballantynes. I shall operate on a sliding scale, helping the most necessitous cases first."

When she did not answer he continued :

"I shall mortgage my salary. A man can live on very little out there, or he can be extravagant and spend as much as he gets. I will cut everything but sheer living for the next five or six years, and make use of every legitimate opportunity to make money."

Beatrice folded her hands and sat very still, her eyes fixed on the window from which she could just catch a glimpse of the distant sea.

There was a silence which she broke.

"Your mother?" she said with difficulty, "will she help?"

"No; she thinks I am quite mad."

"But it is wrong," said Beatrice with a sombre note of passion in her voice. "She could sell Linnorie; think of what it would bring to the relief fund!"

"It is what I would like her to do, for she has no use for it, and intends to leave Scotland. But she will not listen. She is going to let it furnished and travel abroad; in fact, I think she has already let it."

"It is wrong," repeated Beatrice; "I can't understand her mentality."

"She argues that it was no fault of hers, and that the dead past should be allowed to bury its dead."

"Is the suffering of these poor people nothing to her?" cried Beatrice, and her voice was as poignant as a sword's edge. "I shall be haunted by them—spectres from whom there is no escape."

"She does not look at it like you," was all that Brodie said, then after a moment he added, "Linnorie is much smaller now; I don't know if you are aware that most of the farms changed hands in my father's lifetime. Several of the tenants bought their holdings. There is only the home farm now and the house, and the old inn, with a handful of cottages in the village."

Beatrice looked both interested and surprised.

"I had not heard. Well, I can't find words to tell you what I think of all you have done. It fills me with envy, because as yet I can do so little. But I shall be able to help next year I hope. I am getting on well here, and when I have the business for myself I will save every penny."

"But you are not so responsible as I am. It was my father's doing, not your father's."

"Ah, but don't you see; it is the name!" cried Beatrice feverishly. "It was the old name, Heron, they trusted, thinking it impossible that anyone bearing it could even connive at anything not absolutely straight and sure."

Brodie could not gainsay that, because in the painful interviews he had endured that week he had had the fact rubbed into his inmost consciousness. Among Edinburgh folks the name of Brodie counted for very little, whereas that of Heron had stood for generations for things honest, things lovely and of good report.

"Well, that is the account of my week's work; I have still some to do."

"And who will administer the funds while you are so far away?" she asked. "I should like to know, so that the moment I have anything to spare I can pay it in."

He hesitated a moment before he answered very

gently. "I will give you the name if you desire it, but honestly I don't think you should feel yourself responsible even for a share. Besides, if you will excuse my saying it, your own position appears to be very precarious."

"It will not be a little later. I am determined to succeed, and I, too, can live on very little. Who is to be the administrator?"

Brodie gave her the name of a young solicitor with whom he had been on intimate terms at school and college, and briefly explained what arrangements he had made with him for the payment of certain moneys, more especially such as were helpless like Mrs. Calder and the Misses Kinloch.

As Beatrice listened she was amazed not only at the practical business method, but at the fine consideration with which it was invested. Her respect for John Brodie increased by leaps and bounds, and her eyes were very soft and lovely as they fixed themselves on his face.

"If you will excuse my making a suggestion, a very efficient way in which you could help would be by paying an occasional call, keeping yourself in personal touch with some of these distressing cases. Then you could let me know whether in your judgment anything required to be altered, that is, if you will take the trouble to write to me at Singapore."

"I could surely do that little thing, after all you have done, and I will go and see both the Misses Kinloch and Mrs. Calder, as well as some of the others by degrees."

"Thank you, then I shall go back with a happier mind," he said, and suddenly rising took a turn across the floor. "May I see you again during the next few days?"

"Yes, if you wish it; why not?"

"Thank you. I am grateful even for that. I wish to stand well with you, Miss Heron. I dare say you have understood that?"

"I have not thought about it at all," she answered, and once more seemed to withdraw into herself, her momentary softening gone.

"Nevertheless, it was when I discovered how you felt about this whole unhappy business that my plan of relief, or rather my justice plan, crystallised."

Beatrice made no answer. Then a sudden passion flamed in Brodie's eyes, as squaring his shoulders he looked at her steadfastly.

"I don't suppose you can have guessed, I love you. I want you for my wife, and if this unhappy business which brought us together first helps me to win you, why then I shall not regret it."

Beatrice paled to a deadly colour, then the flame rushed back to her cheeks.

"You must be quite mad, Mr. Brodie. We have met only twice. It is impossible you can feel like that. Please don't say any more."

"When I saw you the last time I knew that it was all up with me, and that I had met the only woman I should ever marry. If you refuse me I shall never look at another. It is like that with some men. Do you think you could?"

She held up a swift deprecating hand. "No, no, never! It is quite impossible! Your name—don't you see there are graves between us. It could never, never be!"

He started as if he had been stung, and turning slowly, walked out of the room.

CHAPTER XVII

BEATRICE stood perfectly still for several minutes after the door had closed upon her, her lips tightly compressed like her hands, her expression one of anger, touched with ineffable surprise. It was absolutely her first offer of marriage, and while her heart did not respond to it, she felt the foundations of her being shaken. She thought it at the first moment a monstrous thing, and almost convinced herself that Mrs. Brodie had not been far wrong in concluding that her son had taken leave of his senses. But at the back of her mind she knew perfectly well, just as his mother did, that there was no saner, better-balanced man than John Brodie in the world. How was it then that he had so far forgotten himself as to speak these extraordinary and quite irrevocable words? She was still in the midst of wonder when Madame Theodore, who had observed through a half-open door John Brodie going down the outer stairs, came toiling up, so greatly interested that she could not wait for Beatrice to come down.

"Well, what's happened? You've sent that nice man away with a bee in his bonnet. I happened to see him hurrying down the stairs. Can I ask what has happened?"

Beatrice flushed again and shook her head. She was very fond of Madame Theodore, but tell her John Brodie's cause of offence? Never!

"We have been talking about the victims of the Trust frauds. He has been very industrious since we met last, getting a complete list of the shareholders, and investigating their individual needs."

"He looks like a person who would do anything thoroughly," observed Madame Theodore as she smoothed her beautiful white hair, at the same time considering her

young friend's expression intently, and with an inward and devouring curiosity. She was as certain as if Beatrice had told her that something else had happened ; that their conversation had suddenly become too intimate and personal for the girl's liking.

" Well, and what else ? Are you going to co-operate with him ? "

" No ; oh no, nothing of that kind ! He has given me one or two names. I may pay some calls. Also I have the name of the lawyer who is going to act for him in Edinburgh, and when I have anything to pay in I will go to him."

" I would call that co-operating, my dear," suggested the old lady quietly.

" Would you ; well, it is not likely I shall see or hear anything more of Mr. John Brodie."

" Why ? It will be your loss, Beatrice, as well as his."

" That may be, but we shall not be meeting. He is going back to Singapore next week, and as he intends to practise a very rigid economy until he makes full restitution, it is not likely that he will spend money paying another visit to Scotland for a long time."

" I see."

There ensued a moment's silence.

" Has it occurred to you that this is a very extraordinary and unusual thing for a young man to do, something which stamps John Brodie above all common men ? "

" Oh yes ; all that has occurred to me, Madame, but I just don't want to talk about it. Hadn't we better go down ? What o'clock is it ? I'm afraid I've been shirking this afternoon."

" It is twenty minutes to six, my dear, and they are clearing up downstairs. No one else is likely to come in now. Well, it has been an interesting afternoon anyhow. I must say I liked Mr. Brodie ; quite an unusual type of man, and his looks are striking."

" I did not notice them," said Beatrice, whereat Madame Theodore turned aside with a small disbelieving smile.

"I was going to say something, only perhaps I'd better not——"

"Please do say it! You have the right, surely, to say what you like to me."

"Not exactly, only I have lived longer than you, my dear, and seen a number of things, also people, and I never remember being more touched than I am to-day about this man, and what he is contemplating. And because of it I should like——"

"You would like what?"

"To give you a very good shaking. I am as certain as I stand here that you have snubbed him. I saw it in his face."

"If I did he has himself to blame, he spoke words to me he had no right to speak."

"Ah, my dear!" said Madame Theodore, shaking her wise old head. "Take care that your pride and stand-offishness do not shut the door on happiness. There are some doors that don't open twice, and life is very long to a woman when her heart is empty."

She said no more, but immediately turned and went downstairs, Beatrice following, to wind up the day's business. But the thoughts of both were wandering, and they parted earlier than usual without any further word on the subject.

An east wind had sprung up in the late afternoon, and as Beatrice turned her face northwards in the mood to walk all the way home to Trinity, she felt the nip in the air. Also a chill sea fog was coming up, and the grey city looked its greyest. She was glad, even while walking briskly, to wrap her scarf twice about her throat. Her mind was in a strange whirl. She was angry, yet something at the back of her anger took the sting from it.

Brodie's sudden declaration had upset all her preconceived ideas of how wooing should be done. Her proud, rather cold nature resented heat and passion in another, she felt almost that it had belittled her. And yet something sang in her heart, nay, cried there! The woman's demand for personal happiness, for love at any cost! She stifled it, even clenching her hands as she

tried to keep the scarf ends from blowing against her face. She had a strong will, but there is something stronger than the will, the call of the blood, which, like the tang of the wind, has a hidden and secret power.

Beatrice was tired when she reached "The Outlook" about seven o'clock, tired and extraordinarily disheartened. A word would have unsealed the fount of tears. It would be too much to say that she regretted the brusque way in which she had closed the door on a possible experience, the most she would have admitted would have been that she regretted its happening. The usual smell of cooking pervaded the atmosphere, but as she mounted the stairs to her own room on the top floor, she encountered no one. The change from her bedroom to a bed-sitting-room had been accomplished in the course of the week, and the young protégé and relative of Gustav Weile had come into residence the previous evening.

He proved to be an inoffensive and apparently very shy youth, with fair colouring and a shock of sandy-coloured hair cut very short, and brushed back from the forehead, so that it stood straight up on end, giving him an odd, surprised look. This was accentuated by the innocence of his light blue eyes, and a sort of sheepish, ingenuous smile. He could not speak any English, so Beatrice's knowledge of German would come in most useful.

Beatrice did not at all dislike the change to the old work-room. Her bed in the far corner had been made to look as like a settee as possible with an Indian rug and some cushions on it. All her belongings, including her favourite books, were now gathered in one place, and it was a refuge for which she was particularly grateful that evening. She dropped into the chair by the window, from which at an angle she could just catch a glimpse of the sea, when the atmosphere was clear enough. She was, however, conscious of an immense fatigue, both physical and mental, and longed to be able to remain where she was for the rest of the evening. But Lotta was a person who, never requiring solitude or even privacy

for herself, did not understand that it might be a soul's need for another. Had Beatrice sent down word by Lizzie that she was not coming down to dinner, but would like something sent up, a great fuss would have ensued, and questioning would have had no end. So after a minute she rose again and began to take off her outdoor things, hanging them up carefully in the cupboard from which she took the little semi-evening frock of dull black satin made from an old frock of her mother's, which bore the Theodore cachet still, even in its age.

When she was ready to go down she observed accidentally rather than by intent, as she was not a woman who studied her own looks, that she was decidedly pale, and had dark rings round her eyes. Mental strain, when poignant, even though brief, can change some women's appearance quickly. Beatrice descended with the first stroke of the gong, fervently hoping no one would comment on her looks.

Herr Weile had a disagreeable habit of making personal remarks relating to personal appearance, paying gross extravagant compliments to Mrs. Heron, pretty ones to Ida, and occasionally, when he dared, more subtle ones to the member of the trio he secretly admired the most, as some men admire the inaccessible.

As she came to the second landing she met Lotta coming out of the room she shared with Ida.

"Oh, good evening, Bee. I didn't hear you come in!" she said civilly.

"I haven't been long in. I was kept rather later than usual and walked all the way home."

"Trams overcrowded as usual, I suppose?"

"Oh, no, I wanted to walk. I suppose Ida has gone down."

"She's out."

"Out! Where? Won't she be in for dinner?"

"No, she has gone out to dinner with Mr. Weile, and he is taking her to the theatre, one of Barrie's plays, 'What Every Woman Knows.' I think she's always wanted to see it."

"Oh!" said Beatrice, and her tone was not very cordial.

"Was it arranged suddenly? I never heard of it."

"He's had the seats booked for three weeks. I don't know when the dinner was arranged, you'd better ask her. There's Mr. Meikle and Conrad gone in, we'd better go down."

Lotta rustled down the stairs, and Beatrice followed, much disquieted. She did not think Ida should have gone out with the German at all, and the fact that she had not even mentioned that he had asked her troubled her. She imagined Lotta was not very well pleased either, and Beatrice decided that she would question her further when they were alone.

"Good evening, Miss Heron," said Meikle in his jovial, friendly voice. "Our happy home circle is, shall we say, sadly depleted to-night? Well, you'll have to put up with Conrad and me."

Conrad blushed at this direct allusion, and looked rather wistfully at Beatrice, who smiled back at him reassuringly.

"I dare say we shall survive it. Did you not want to go to the play, Mr. Conrad?"

He shook his head, replying in German that his adoration was music, and he hoped the Chamber concerts were not all over for the season. His remark provided a peg for a discussion on German and English music, which happened to be the only subject Conrad was really interested in. This talk went on in German, so that Meikle and Mrs. Heron were left to entertain one another. Lotta was not in a good humour, and spoke much less than usual. The meal dragged a little, in spite of Meikle's cheerful efforts to keep the ball rolling, as he described it. Beatrice felt distinctly relieved when Lotta rose, and they both retired to the drawing-room.

"I don't think I like Ida dining out alone with Mr. Weile, Lotta," said Beatrice, going directly to the matter troubling her. "Do you approve of it?"

Lotta's big black eyes distinctly flashed.

"I wasn't asked. No, I don't approve of it. First of all he asked me whether I'd like to see the play, and I told him I didn't think I could be seen in public yet, excepting perhaps at a matinée, where he couldn't take me. The next thing I heard was that he had taken two

evening seats for himself and Ida, and that she went out to meet him in town. He went straight from the office, where apparently he keeps a suit of evening clothes besides the ones he has here."

"What an odd idea!"

"Nothing very odd about it," snapped Lotta, with an air of quite superior knowledge of business men's ways. "A lot of them do it, quite innocently the most of them, when they are public men, who have to go straight from business to functions sometimes. Of course it can cover up other excursions. Oh, say what you like, men are a queer lot, and you can't trust them any farther than you can see them."

"I'll speak to Ida," said Beatrice firmly. "Father has only been dead a few months. It was not very seemly for her to go out like this, alone with a man whom we really know very little about."

"There's nothing wrong with Gustav Weile, my dear, and I don't altogether blame Ida. She's young, and she hasn't had much of a chance with the queer ideas you Herons hold. I used to tell your father the day had gone for the shutting up of women in glass cases. Of course I've been a woman of the world since I was fifteen, and I know my way about."

Beatrice, not much interested in her stepmother's past, continued to brood on this odd happening. It confirmed her longing to get a little place of her own, to which she could take her young sister and watch over her. The little French flat above the costumier's business in George Street suddenly assumed fresh attractions, appearing like a very haven of refuge.

"A nice boy, that Conrad, don't you think, Bee? He's Weile's brother's son. He wants to learn English, and when you're not in never utters a word of German. It's extraordinary how hard they'll all work at learning languages. We don't seem to bother in the same way."

"No, but we shall have to," said Beatrice rather absently. "Business must suffer tremendously because so few of us know any other language but our own. Every day I see it and I thank God lots of times for

my three years abroad. I can interview Madame Theodore's French travellers and customers without a tremor now."

"But apparently she's got on all right without languages," said Lotta shrewdly.

"She is always deploring her lack, though. She has picked up just a smattering of business French which enables her to get along without disaster. But she is always assuring me what an asset my languages are to me."

"You're not fed up with it yet, then?"

Beatrice shook her head.

"In October Madame is going to retire definitely and leave me to carry on."

Lotta evinced the supreme surprise she felt.

"Oh, goodness, aren't you scared blue at the prospect? Will you be able for it? Won't you make an awful mess of things?"

"She thinks not, anyhow she has made up her mind and she's going to America for three months, to see a married sister in Philadelphia, and whom she hasn't seen for over twenty years."

"Goodness me!" repeated Lotta, her eyes ever widening with surprise. "And if it's not too much impudence, might I ask on what terms she's doing all this? Her goodwill must be worth a pretty penny, for, of course, it's the best business of its kind in Edinburgh."

Beatrice thus cornered did not know how to answer, but decided on the truth.

"Madame Théodore fancies that she owes a great deal to my mother, Lotta, she was often at Linnorie in the old days, and she will take nothing for the goodwill. When we draw up our agreement, however, I must insist on sharing profits with her for a time."

"If there are any," put in Lotta. "It'll make a difference when she leaves for of course, you're only an amateur."

"Of course," assented Beatrice, not caring to expatiate on her own individual and very artistic taste which delighted Madame Theodore every day, and had surprised Monsieur Dubois.

"It's a queer adventure altogether, but I'm sure I wish you well."

"When Madame leaves I shall go and live at the flat, Lotta, and I don't suppose you will mind very much if I take Ida to live with me. It would be better for her than——"

"Than under my roof. Thank you for nothing," said Lotta with exceeding dryness.

"Not because it is your roof, but you must see for yourself, it is not nice for her to have admirers like Mr. Weile."

"Why not? It's her only chance of picking up a rich husband or any kind of husband for that matter. There's nothing the matter with Gustav Weile."

"But he's a man of the world, and don't you go imagining that because he's asked her out to dinner and a theatre that he is going to marry a crude little cabbage like Ida."

The door opened just then, and the two men came in. Conrad went at once to the piano, and the beautiful melody which he wooed from its faded, yellow notes soothed Beatrice insensibly.

She took out her knitting bag and sat down for an hour, quite contentedly, which she would not have done had Weile been of the company. Rightly or wrongly she felt a great and growing antagonism towards him, and had the kind of feeling that he was not straight. She had no grounds at all for this assumption, since he paid regularly and handsomely, made frequent gifts of fruit and flowers for the general good, and was a model of considerate kindness in the house.

But the doubt and the antagonism remained, and the only thing she could do was to take the line of least resistance, and see as little of him as possible. About half-past nine she said good night, and retired to her own sanctum, where she sat down, lit her gas fire, and, kicking off her slippers, sank into a very old basket chair in which Nannie at Linnorie had rocked the Heron babies. With her hands clasped above her head and her eyes fixed on the glow of the little gas fire, poor substitute for the

crackle of scented logs, or the tang of and glow of the peat, she started thinking, of Ida first and the new interests, some of them admittedly perilous, which were coming into the child's life.

But very soon her thoughts wandered and focused on her own affairs, on John Brodie, and the expression of wounded pain on his face when her cruel words drove him from her presence. She regretted them with a sharpness which astounded her, but what could she do? It was not very easy for any Heron to acknowledge error or defeat, and she was one of the proudest and most difficult of their line. But she would never shirk an obvious duty, and she felt that she owed a word of apology, or at least of acknowledgment, to John Brodie. What could have exceeded his fine consideration, his chivalrous kindness? She had repaid very ill the man who, at one with her regarding sacred obligations, had shown how willing and capable he was of meeting them each one. If only he had been content to let the fine flower of friendship and understanding grow, and ask nothing more!

It was a dangerous line to pursue, so presently she jumped up, unlocked the old bureau in which she kept her few private papers, and pulling out a sheet of note-paper, began to write.

"Dear Mr. Brodie,"—she began, and then, with her pen against her lips, sat a long time pondering her choice of words.

Was ever task more difficult, more delicate, for while she wished to soften the words she had spoken, she did not wish to recall them. Finally she managed to string together some sentences which passed the bar of her judgment.

"Dear Mr. Brodie,

"I feel that I wish to convey to you in a way I was unable to do this afternoon my very deep sense of your great consideration and kindness to me personally, and also my admiration for the splendid way in which you are addressing yourself to the task of reparation. It is a comfort to me to know that your strong influence

is at work in a cause which lies so near and so heavily on my heart. I have no more to say except to wish you God speed and good-bye,

*" Sincerely yours,
" Beatrice Heron."*

Scarcely had she closed and addressed it when the rumble of a taxi cab in the narrow street indicated the return of the theatre-goers.

CHAPTER XVIII

BEATRICE hesitated about going down, then decided against it. The sound of cheerful rather excited voices came floating up the stairs, the direction indicating that they had assembled in the dining-room, where, probably, Lotta would be offering some refreshment. Quite twenty minutes passed, and Beatrice had taken off her frock and got into her dressing gown, before she heard Ida's light foot on the stairs.

"Are you there, Bee?" she called at the bottom of the attic stairs, the room she shared with her stepmother being on the lower floor,

Beatrice opened the door and called to her to come up.

She came quickly, her black velvet evening wrap, which had a collar of white fur, flying from her shoulders. The touch of white over her dead black frock became her well, giving an odd, almost pathetic childishness to the outline of her face.

"Why didn't you come down, Bee? You might have done, to thank Mr. Weile for giving me such a perfectly heavenly time."

Beatrice wanted desperately to say she had neither the desire nor the will to thank him for what she did not in the least approve of, but she could not dash the cup of pleasure from Ida's hand just then. She looked the embodiment of radiant youth, her cheeks were flushed, her eyes bright and dancing, her whole being alive.

"I'm glad you enjoyed yourself, dear. Was it a good play?"

"Oh, splendid—most amusing—you would have liked it, Bee; I kept saying that to Mr. Weile at the end of every act."

"I'm sure that wouldn't interest Mr. Weile in the smallest degree," said Beatrice rather dryly.

"Oh, but it did, we talked quite a lot about you; I assure you he is tremendously interested in you!" cried Ida eagerly. "I enjoyed every moment of my evening. Such a splendid dinner at the North British Hotel! Lots and lots of people dining there in evening dress. Oh, Bee, we don't know anything about life, really! It has always been so drab and grey for us. I felt the contrast to-night almost painful."

She sat down on the edge of her sister's bed and, letting her cloak fall off, dropped her chin on her hand.

"I dare say if you had spoken intimately with most of these fine folks in the hotel and in the theatre you would have found that they all have something to contend against."

"Oh yes, perhaps, but money oils the wheels of life. Mr. Weile must have an awful lot. He simply threw it about to-night. We had real champagne, Bee!"

"But you didn't drink it, dear?" said Beatrice in alarm.

"Just half a glass; it is wonderful stuff; it makes one feel so gay and cheerful; but I was afraid to take any more in case I should get too excited. And such heavenly food! It was a special dinner, Bee, and the head waiter came and showed Mr. Weile every dish before he served it to us."

Beatrice did not seem impressed. Perhaps she was impressed so much that she could not talk about it.

"It's half-past eleven now, dear. Let me unfasten your frock. You ought to be in bed. Was Lotta downstairs when you came in?"

"Oh yes, she's there in the dining-room talking to Mr. Weile yet, but I don't think somehow she was so very pleased about it."

"Why didn't you tell me you had this adventure on to-night, Ida?"

The girl's face flushed slightly. "Well, honestly, Bee, I was afraid you'd put a spoke in my wheel. You see, I know you're not so awfully keen on Mr. Weile."

"I'm not. I don't trust him one little bit."

"You are merely prejudiced because he happens to be German," said Ida rather hotly. "He is a perfect gentleman."

"A perfect gentleman!" murmured Beatrice, with a slight lift of the brows. "I rather wish you'd define him."

"Well, his manners are perfect; then he's so thoughtful and chivalrous; never forgets the little attentions the Scotsman only remembers when it is too late."

"Oh come, Ida, don't go back on your own country!"

"I'm not—only stating facts. Even Jimmy Grier——"

At mention of Jimmy's name she came to an odd stop.

Beatrice took up the challenge. "Jimmy won't like to hear about to-night, Ida; shall you tell him?"

It was a bow at a venture, for Beatrice was not aware of what had passed between her sister and Jimmy Grier on the little strip of sand at Dalmeny.

"Jimmy wouldn't mind, why should he?" cried Ida, jumping up. "A real friend is glad when one gets a little pleasure, even if it is another who bestows it. Well, good night, Bee. I shall be dreaming all night about Maggie and her lack of charm. What is charm, Bee?"

"I'm sure I couldn't say."

"Mr. Weile was trying to explain it, but the more you try to explain it the more uncommunicable and elusive it seems to be. I don't think Scotswomen have it much, anyway. Barrie made his heroine true to type."

"We can't discuss the ethics of Barrie or our national characteristics at midnight, child. Off you go to bed and sleep, and I hope this isn't going to create a precedent. It wouldn't be good for you to have such excitement too often repeated."

"Some girls have it every night—then they cease to be excited, I suppose. That's the kind of life I'd like instead of grubbing along here working at humdrum household things. You've no idea what a lot I have to do here, Bee."

"I can guess. Lotta will see that you are not idle," said Beatrice coldly. "Does she still go to sleep every afternoon for a couple of hours?"

To Beatrice the idea that a young, strong, vigorous woman like her stepmother, who slept soundly through a long night, should idle the major part of the afternoon on

her bed, had always been a mystery and a habit she had secretly despised.

"Oh yes; she says it is what keeps wrinkles away; but there is quite a lot to do, and Lotta thinks very well of my cooking. We really ought to have another servant besides Lizzie. Big late dinners like we have now and difficult men to please need quite a lot of thinking."

"And doing," added Beatrice. "Apparently you get the lion's share. Well, we must talk things over in the daytime, and not filch away our night's sleep. There are no afternoon sleeps for us, even if we needed them. Don't worry, dear child. Soon, perhaps very soon, I may get possession of Madame Theodore's house, then you'll come to me. I've paved the way with Lotta already to-night when we were talking about you going out with Mr. Weile."

Beatrice anxiously watched for the effect of these words, but could discover no enthusiasm in her sister's face.

"Oh, that must be a long way off, even if it ever happened, Bee," she said with a yawn she was at no pains to hide. "Though I said all that about the work I don't dislike it really, and I'm getting to have quite a pride in my cooking, only Lotta takes care none of them know who does it. I don't think old Theo's flat would be such a very great improvement on this, with you at business all day and nobody coming in to break the monotony at night."

With that she went off to bed, her high heels clattering down the attic stairs which were covered by a bit of drugget incapable of deadening any sound.

Beatrice was now thoroughly miserable, and her face looked old and tired as she proceeded with her own undressing before the little gas stove, often making pause as if multitudinous thoughts oppressed her. Once she coloured up quickly, and angrily dashed her hand to her cheek as if in reproof or shame.

It was the thought of John Brodie that obtruded, the light in his eager eyes, the vibration of his voice kept on knocking at her heart.

As she moved over to turn out her light, she lifted the unsealed letter from the blotting pad and, drawing it out,

read it over. It was very dignified and ample, considered from her viewpoint, which invariably erred on the side of reticence. Yes, she would post it as she went to business next morning.

Very often she had to dispense coffee to the gentlemen, who, like her, had fixed hours to observe. She was a little late next morning, and found only Weile in the dining-room, getting his own breakfast, the hostess not being down yet, and the others presumably having left.

"Ah, good morning, Miss Heron," he said in his usual suave voice; "we come in single spies this morning."

The quotation, though apt enough, more apt perhaps than was intended, hardly provoked a smile on Miss Heron's face.

"Mrs. Heron will be down immediately, she is almost ready; have the others gone?"

"Yes. Our good Meikle has just a minute ago taken himself off. As for Conrad, he has to be at the office at eight-thirty. It is necessary for the young to observe discipline and punctuality. It is the only foundation for success."

Beatrice made no reply, but filled herself out a cup of tea, refusing the offer of bacon and eggs from the sideboard where Lizzie had placed it above the lamp of the chafing dish.

"I hope your charming sister is very well this morning?" was Weile's next remark.

"I haven't seen her. She is not up; no doubt she is very tired, not being accustomed to such late hours."

"It was not so very late. Nothing is late here in comparison with London and other cities. It was very little after eleven o'clock when we returned." He spoke rapidly and was all the while trying to gauge her opinion of the evening's outing. From Beatrice's expression it was never possible to gauge her inward feelings; she had successfully achieved, either by nature or cultivation, a complete mask for them. Her face could present a blank wall, yet, when animated and in the company of those who understood and liked, she could become a radiant being. Weile, however, had never seen her other than austere and quiet, a little forbidding,

like the prevailing wind in that quarter of the globe where his immediate lot was cast.

"She enjoyed herself—the little one," he said, rolling his words smoothly as he ate in the somewhat obtrusive manner common to his nation. "It is a treat to take out a fresh *ingénue* who likes everything, and has no criticism to make. We, who are older, are apt to get tired and *blasé* through much experience, especially of the theatre, where so much is bad, and so little good. But Scotland has an asset undoubtedly in your Mr. Barrie, though I confess some of his humour was lost upon me."

"It is not good for my sister to have such nights out, Mr. Weile," said Beatrice, ignoring his attempt to draw her into friendly discussion regarding the drama in Scotland, and reflecting that never would a better opportunity for expressing herself be likely to offer. "It unsettles her. I shall be very greatly obliged if you will not ask her again."

Weile was silent a full minute, focusing his attention on his food. His face also was set masklike, and Beatrice was surprised that features regular and in the popular sense handsome should be able to present such a Machiavellian type.

Presently he raised his head and looked at her squarely, his eyes smiling. "You are not pleased, but what is one to do, Miss Heron? Deprived of a bright particular star, one turns, naturally, to the lesser lights. And there seems to me no earthly reason why that poor child, who works so hard and with such admirable results, should not be given a little pleasure by a grateful recipient. That is my view. It is not permissible to change it without greater reason."

Lotta entered at the moment, looking cross and out of sorts. She merely nodded to them both, and went to see what the chafing dish held. Beatrice rose, pushed back her half-finished tea, and left the room. She had the feeling that all her affairs were being enmeshed in a strange web of circumstance, perhaps of destiny, against which she was powerless to fight.

Where Ida was concerned she was particularly helpless ;

she had no real jurisdiction save that of affection over her, and she had known for some weeks that that was weakening. Sinister forces were working in the background to separate them. The one ray of hope was that Lotta, for some private and personal reason that had naught to do with Ida's welfare, was not pleased about the Weile incident, resenting the open attention her favourite boarder was inclined to show. Very likely Lotta would find some way of ensuring this outing should not be repeated.

But Beatrice's heart was heavy as she walked up the hill to the car line. She had made no attempt to see her sister, feeling that neither would be in the mood for profitable exchange of words. The letter she had written to Brodie, sealed, but yet unstamped, was in the outer flap of her bag. She passed several post offices, but did not pause to go in and buy a stamp, and though she could have got one from Madame for the asking, the letter lay in the outside pocket of the bag all day. From a business point of view it was a very good day. The sweet spring weather promising early and possibly beneficent summer was tempting customers to thoughts of new clothes. The little salons, if not crowded, were at least kept incessantly occupied during business hours, both Beatrice and Madame Theodore being kept fully engaged till lunch, which they usually partook of together in the flat upstairs. They were just finishing when the voice up the speaking tube summoned them down again.

"It is Mrs. Compton Brodie," the voice said.

Beatrice, who had risen to speak into the tube, felt her face flushing, and it angered her. What foolery was this that she could not hear the quite ordinary name without shewing some flag of consciousness or distress?

"It is Mrs. Compton Brodie, Miss Gardiner says."

"Mrs. Compton Brodie! Probably it is you she wants to see. Ask Katie."

Beatrice asked, and then turned a more composed face round for her old friend's inspection.

"She doesn't say. Please go down, Madame. I do not want to see Mrs. Brodie."

"But if she asks for you specially, what am I to say? I've refused her as a customer more than once, but she may have come on quite other business to-day."

"I have no interest in her, and certainly I don't want to see her," was all that Beatrice said.

Madame folded up her napkin and prepared to go down. Beatrice, who had no excuse for not following, lingered a few minutes hoping that when she descended she should find that Mrs. Brodie had gone. In this she was, however, disappointed. She found Katie Gardiner, the show-room hand, exhibiting models of travelling wraps to Mrs. Brodie, Madame standing by with an odd expression on her face. When Beatrice entered she made no move at all, though the situation interested her extremely. The expression on Mrs. Brodie's face when Beatrice entered conveyed to Madame Theodore what had been the main object of her visit.

She advanced, holding out a cordial enough hand. "How do you do, Miss Heron. I was hoping to see you. I hope you are quite well."

"Quite well, thank you," answered Beatrice, and though she had to extend her hand to meet the offered one, she did not return the slight pressure.

"And your sister and Mrs. Heron?" queried Mrs. Brodie politely.

"Both quite well, thank you," answered Beatrice, but did not respond by making any inquiry regarding Mrs. Brodie's health or that of her daughter. The moment was one of extreme strain which Madame Theodore made a move to relieve.

"I think I can safely leave you to Miss Heron, madam. As you are old friends no doubt you have something to say to one another. Do you really wish to see the wraps?" she added significantly.

"Yes I do, but I must wait for my daughter, as it is for her I want to find one. She will be here immediately."

"Ah, then the young lady can wait on you later," said Madame, and signalling to Katie Gardiner with her eyes they left the two together. Beatrice did not look pleased and made no effort to carry on a conversation she did not desire and had not sought.

"I hope that you are—that you are—getting on well here, Miss Heron?" said Mrs. Brodie a trifle nervously.

"Quite well, thank you," answered Beatrice lifelessly. She could not forget how John Brodie had assured her that his mother had no sympathy with his ideals or plans, and that she considered him mad to entertain them. For what reason then had she come there that day? It was an intrusion which Beatrice hotly resented.

Mrs. Brodie was nonplussed by the statuesque calm displayed by Miss Heron and the extreme difficulty of getting any kind of opening for what she wished to say.

"I understand that you have seen my son?" she began then.

In spite of the desperate effort she made, Beatrice's colour rose. "Yes, I have seen him."

"He has, I suppose, acquainted you with the quixotic ideas he holds about his obligations to the shareholders in the Bergholt Mines."

Beatrice inclined her head.

"May I ask whether you have encouraged him in it? Was it not to you he first owed the suggestion?"

"No, Mrs. Brodie; your son came to me of his own accord, and before I had approached the subject he informed me of the conclusions to which he had come, and what he intended to do."

"But you approve of them? I gathered as much from him."

Beatrice was cornered.

"I approve of them, certainly. I will help as I can. In a little while I expect to be able to do my share. In the meantime I admire Mr. John Brodie's attitude, and I only hope that such success will attend him that he will be able to clear his father's name earlier than he expects."

Mrs. Brodie winced slightly at that direct thrust, and threw back her handsome head. "Of course, what I think is that you are a couple of fools. My son can't afford to behave like a Quixote, and nobody expects it of him."

Beatrice made no answer.

"Shall you be seeing him again?"

"I don't expect so."

"My only hope is that he may go back to the Straits Settlements and forget all about it. It is the best thing that could possibly happen to him. He was getting on very well and saving money. Soon he would have been able to marry and make a home for himself. There are many delightful women apparently among the English colony there. Now they will have to wait indefinitely."

Beatrice inwardly smiled, fully aware, so fine and acute was her perception, that Mrs. Brodie was merely warning her off the family preserve. It was a very pretty bit of comedy, which the lighter vein in her tempted her to pursue a little further.

"That is a pity of course, Mrs. Brodie, but perhaps the lady in question may sympathise to the extent of waiting for better times."

Perhaps Mrs. Brodie detected the slight note of raillery, for she turned aside impatiently and took up one of the Paris wraps.

"You must hate this, don't you now, Miss Heron?"

"No; it is amusing and interesting, and business is really an exact science. I have never been more interested in my life."

"But don't you dislike meeting people like myself, for instance, whom you used to know, in your new capacity?"

"They do not know me now, madam, excepting in my new capacity, and I greatly prefer it," said Beatrice quietly. It was a distinct snub. Mrs. Brodie, who had gotten the worst of the brief interview to which she had keyed herself up after some talk with her son, looked impatiently at the clock.

"Now I wonder how long that tiresome child will be. I left her in a book shop choosing some books for her brother to take back with him. Ah, here she comes!"

Monica came in quickly, and seeing Beatrice ran forward clasping both her hands. "Oh, dear Miss Heron, I'm so glad to see you! How well and nice she looks, doesn't she, mummy? I'm sure I should love this sort of life; doesn't it amuse you beyond everything?"

"It does, indeed," answered Beatrice, and warmth crept back to her voice and a sweet light to her cold eyes.

If they had been alone she would certainly have kissed the dear human thing, so greatly moved was she by her spontaneous kindliness, by something which struck a deeper note than mere conventionality.

"Can we have the young person to show the wraps now?" asked Mrs. Brodie, in cool rather reproving voice.

"I can show them," said Beatrice quickly, and, without a trace of embarrassment, she picked up one after the other, slipped them over her own plain gown, and then tried the effect on Monica's figure.

"Oh, they don't look the same at all!" cried the girl. "In this one, with the purple silk lining, you look like a queen, and I look like a little old woman. They take wearing, mummy, and I'm only a little brown bird."

But Beatrice found something to suit her at last, and she only remembered afterwards, with a little thrill of bitterness, that there was no haggling about the price.

When the matter was settled, Mrs. Brodie bade her good afternoon and walked out, but Monica ran back and threw her arms round Beatrice's neck.

"Oh you dear, I love you, and I think it's a horrid shame, and all wrong the way we are going on. I know what John and you are doing, and it is splendid. God bless you both."

She was gone even as she spoke, and Beatrice felt her eyes wet for a moment, her heart warmed and comforted.

She posted the letter to John Brodie on the way home.

CHAPTER XIX

ALTHOUGH Beatrice believed that she expected no answer to her letter nor yet desired it, she was humbled to discover herself counting the days which must intervene before John Brodie should leave Edinburgh, and put the breadth of dividing seas between them.

Madame Theodore, watching her closely, as love watches the beloved object, discerned that she was more actively unhappy than she had yet seen her, and apparently with less cause. The habit of introspection undoubtedly was growing upon the girl in these difficult days, and telling upon her health and spirits. Had Madame Theodore known of Brodie's precipitate proposal, and the manner in which Beatrice had received it, she would have had a bright light shed on the immediate problem, though she might have found it hard to believe that Beatrice Heron whom men had found remote, cold, inaccessible as the north star, was beginning to eat her very natural and human heart out for dear love's sake.

Sunday at home Beatrice found intolerably long. She did not go to church, for some reason she could not have put into words, but instead walked in the teeth of a raw east wind to the strip of pebbly beach beyond Granton piers and harbours to which Jimmy Grier had taken Ida on another momentous Sunday afternoon. There, in an interlude of very brief watery sunshine, she sat down on a rock and stared idly out across the grey and tumbling sea.

Monday made her fully aware of a feverish eagerness to greet the postman, but he passed by the gate of "The Outlook" both morning, noon and evening. As the hours and days sped, Beatrice became conscious of a strange numbness of feeling which both surprised and angered her. Though not compelled to do so, Beatrice

conceived the idea of paying her first call on the two old ladies in Drummond Place whom John Brodie had placed first on the list of sufferers through the financial crash he was trying to repair.

She shrank a little from the task, yet welcomed it as relief from the burden of her own thoughts, which were sad with a sadness which could not be uttered. Had Beatrice had more experience of, men she would have found some means of preparing the way for further reopening the avenue of communication between herself and Brodie. Sometimes in secret her cheeks burned because she had stooped to plead for forgiveness and had been scorned. It costs proud, still natures untold suffering to acknowledge error or defeat, and unless they are met generously, they shrink further back into complete silence, which sometimes proves unbreakable.

Beatrice had pictured Brodie's reception of the letter, his expression while he scanned her hastily written words, and had beheld in fancy the fragments cast in scorn into the fire or to the four winds of Heaven. Nothing of the sort had happened, but that was the picture her morbid imagination drew.

She found the house of the old ladies without difficulty and, climbing to the first floor, rang the bell without permitting herself to wait a moment. As she stood on the mat she recalled Donald Grier's amusing account of his experiences as a young minister, called to his first pastoral visitations, and how frequently he had run away after ringing the bell. She understood his feelings now, and sympathised with him.

The door was opened, after a brief interval, by one of the smallest women she had ever seen, a little, dainty figure, not more than four feet in height, dressed in sober black with a little crossover of lace, and a cap with mauve ribbons tied under her chin in the fashion of a bygone day. She had bright, black eyes, which surveyed the tall young lady on the mat in quite a friendly way. Beatrice, finding it difficult to explain her visit, was seized with a sudden shyness.

"My name is Beatrice Heron," she said quite simply, and then added with an impulse which she could not

explain, "I am a friend of Mr. John Brodie, whom you know."

Instantly the door was flung wide, as if a passport of undisputed quality had been shewn.

"Come in, Miss Heron. I am indeed pleased to see you. If you are a daughter of Mr. Walter Heron, our father, one of Her Majesty's judges, used to meet him in the old days. Come in."

Beatrice entered joyfully. There was no atmosphere of carping or complaint, no punishment of the innocent for the guilty, but the true gentlehood which gets down quickly to essential things.

The door was closed, and Beatrice was ushered into an old-fashioned sitting-room, shabby to a degree, yet which, somehow, had absorbed and retained an impression of dignity, and even a kind of beauty, which made a fine setting for these two frail derelicts on the shores of time, both very old, and totally unfitted to do battle with life.

Beatrice shuddered inwardly as she was introduced to Miss Ellen, who was not able to leave her sofa, as she pictured what their condition and estate might have been had John Brodie been—well—a different kind of man.

"This is a Miss Heron, Ellen, a daughter of Mr. Walter Heron, and a friend of Mr. John Brodie."

The invalid smiled too, and, disengaging one of her frail white hands from her knitting, offered it.

Then Beatrice sat down, feeling suddenly weak, and unable to pursue the conversation or to start a subject. But none was needed. John Brodie proved to be the only theme.

"I think it so wonderful," piped the elder Miss Kinloch, "that Mr. Brodie should have come back just when we were feeling very sad and perplexed, to explain to us that things were not so bad at all, and that we would not need to remove from this dear little home our father bought for us and left to us when he died. He was not rich, because he gave away so much in his lifetime to poor gentlewomen like us, and he was determined that we should be safeguarded against the misfortune and distress which others have had to suffer."

Beatrice's expression slightly altered. She had heard her

father speak often of their father, the fiery old judge whose denunciations of wilful wrongdoing, especially on the part of schemers and robbers in public trusts, had been a byword in his day. She could almost hear in imagination the scathing terms in which he would have characterised what had happened to the old firm in which he had had sufficient confidence to place his daughters' affairs.

"You see, women do not understand business. It is not intended that they should," cooed Miss Kinloch in her gentle, apologetic voice. "Nor is it necessary, Miss Heron, when there are so many splendid men to act for them."

"It might be better though, if women knew a little more," suggested Beatrice. "Enough, at least, to safeguard themselves."

"Ah well, possibly, but we have never needed or felt the lack of it, have we, Ellen?"

"No, but I agree with Miss Heron. See what trouble Mr. Brodie had to explain things to us both times he has been here."

"When was he here last?" asked Beatrice, and hated herself for the putting the question.

"Only yesterday, to say good-bye I think he said, did he not?"

Each word as it fell from that babbling old tongue seemed like a two-edged sword. For, knowing in the innermost fibre of her being that it was all true of the man they spoke of, how she treated him, with what measure had she requited his generous consideration for her, and for all men.

"He assured us that there had been some retrieval, and that nothing would be as bad as he had been led to expect and fear. We need not alter our way of life; indeed, we have always been most careful, for we were taught to be that so that we might help others. He very particularly assured us that poor Mr. Heron, for whom our dear father thought so highly as a young man, was not in the least to blame."

Beatrice turned round sharply with a question on her lips which, however, was strangled at the birth. If he

had gone out of his way to clear her father's memory to these confused and trembling women, what could he have said of his own? She dared not ask it, though her eyes were filled with a dumb questioning. Still Miss Kinloch meandered on.

"He tells us that the business standard has changed for the worse, and that there are unprincipled people in the world who live off the ignorance and trust of others. Very sad, is it not? All seem in haste to be rich. If only they would be content with simple things. It is with them true happiness lies, do you not think so, Miss Heron?"

There was a mingled note of perplexity and appeal in the old lady's voice now, for Beatrice Heron's silence troubled her. Also her face was tragic, her eyes lit by sombre fires.

"We hope very much you have not suffered, in your circumstances. It would make us happier to know that it has made no difference."

"Oh, but it has. That was inevitable, but it has been a good change, converting three rather useless women—my sister, my stepmother and myself—into workers. I am learning dressmaking and millinery with Madame Theodore in George Street."

Up went the poor old lady's hands in pious horror. She belonged to the old regime, to the cult of gentlehood which had no use for the labour of the hands.

"Our home at Trinity has been converted into a boarding house, full of strange people, but that is nothing. We are glad to work, are happier so. Now I must not intrude further, excepting to say that I shall be happier now I know that you are able to go on as you have always done."

"But, dear Miss Heron, what you tell us is really rather terrible, is it not, Ellen?" cried the little old lady.

"Not at all terrible," Beatrice assured her cheerfully. "I like my work very much, and I am going to succeed in it, which is even more important. But don't let us talk any more about these sad things. Won't you tell me something about the old Edinburgh days? I am

sure the Edinburgh of Lord Kinloch's day must have been far more interesting than ours. Tell me, did you ever meet in your father's house the author of 'Rab and his Friends,' or Delta, or any others of those splendid great ones who made Edinburgh famous?"

Immediately Beatrice discovered that she had tapped a rich and unfathomable well of memory and experience. For the next half-hour all she had to do was to listen, interpolating an occasional question or remark, while they brought from their store reminiscences of the fragrant, dear days of their youth. When she rose to go at last, they begged her to come again, soon and often. She promised, fully aware that the link was John Brodie. The visit added to the sum of her gratitude to him, and her wonder over his singular personality.

But at the back of her brain hammered the desolating fact that he was going away across the seas, where kindly thoughts could hardly reach him. It was even possible that they might never meet again.

Travelling to London by the night train, people went to the station often to bid late travellers God-speed and farewell, why not she? She even went to the post office and, under pretext of buying a stamp, asked to see a railway time table.

Three trains went out from the city that evening from different stations. Supposing for a moment she should so far overcome her natural reserve as to seek him on a public platform, most likely she would choose the wrong station, time and train. It was not to be thought of, and yet the thought and desire lingered, and ought to have been conveyed by some channel of telepathy to John Brodie, spending a stormy and unhappy evening with his mother, who disapproved of all his actions and most of his thoughts. She felt no desire to go home yet, and in the post office she took out her little address book in which she had made some notes of the cases John Brodie had relieved.

Next to the Misses Kinloch was the name Ballantyne, Rankeillor Street. It was on the south side of the city, but the spring evenings were lengthening and there was no reason for her to hasten home. She stepped out,

and after walking back to Princes Street, took the tram car that would bring her to her destination.

It was an odd little house, a mere cottage standing on the ridge overlooking the Queen's Park, and the strange cliff-like ridge of the hill known as Samson's Ribs. Just a handful of delectable houses stood there, and none were ever to let. They were beloved of artists and literary folk, who loved their old world flavour. Beatrice was once more conscious of personal shrinking from intrusion, and she pushed back the little wrought iron gate and walked up the flagged stone passage to the half-open door. She did not like the task she had set herself, but was determined to go through with it no matter what it cost, imagining in some dim way that she was not only supplementing John Brodie's good deeds, but in some remote way associating herself with him in their performance.

When no answer came to her somewhat timid ring she ventured to knock at the inner door of obscured glass, and was rewarded by hearing a step immediately on the passage. The door was opened by a man whom she supposed must be Ballantyne himself, a short, thick-set person, with a dark face, a good solid square head and jaw, and a pair of shrewd grey eyes which took the strange lady in from top to toe, supposing her to be one of the collecting ladies who made his wife's life a burden with their incessant rings and requests for subscriptions.

"No, Mrs. Ballantyne isn't in," he answered. "She has gone out to tea with the children, and won't be home before seven o'clock."

"Oh, thank you very much. I'm sorry, I should like to have seen her. I suppose you are Mr. Ballantyne."

"I am, ma'am," he answered, and stood still politely, evidently expecting further enlightenment.

"My name is Heron," she said, and again, almost in spite of herself she added, "I am a friend of John Brodie."

Instantly his face brightened, and he held open wide the door which had hitherto only been held defensively ajar.

"Miss Heron, please come in. I'm having tea by

myself, but I should be sorry not to speak to you. Perhaps even you might permit me to offer you a cup."

It was a warm and kindly welcome. Beatrice smiled, crossed the threshold, and the door was shut. The only living-room of the family was a homely, shabby place, but had two bookcases and a piano, and one or two good water colour sketches revealing the tastes of the inmates.

The tea was laid at one end of the table, and Ballantyne, with the methodical air of a man accustomed to help himself, opened the cupboard door and got out a clean cup, saucer and plate.

Beatrice, surprised out of her usual reserve, took the chair he drew up to the table for her and began to draw off her gloves.

"A friend of Mr. John Brodie," he repeated, as if the idea pleased him. "I suppose you know he's leaving Edinburgh to-night. I'm seeing him off at the Caledonian station."

"Oh indeed. Yes, I knew he was going, but——"

"Perhaps you will be seeing him off, too?"

"No," said Beatrice, her face faintly flushing. "His own family will probably do that."

"He asked me to come, and I've something to tell him, anyway. He's a white man, Miss Heron, if ever one lived. I don't expect nor yet ask to meet a whiter one in this world."

"He is certainly good," murmured Beatrice, glad to bend her head over her tea-cup, amazed at the turn of circumstance which had brought her to have a *tête-à-tête* meal with a stranger she had never seen before. Once more John Brodie's name the password and key to the door, his character the guarantee of good faith.

"We were in pretty low water that day he came to see us. You see, it was the wife's little nest egg we'd been having a flutter with, everybody assuring us that the name of the old firm was good enough backing for a scheme. I must say Carrie was very good about it, she never said a word. She's a plucky little woman, but it was a bad job for us and meant a lot of real disappointment. We've two boys, and we've been saving that for their education. Carrie is bent on sending one of them

to Rugby and the other will go to Loretto. It was the prospect of being able to double or treble our little nest egg we risked the money in the Athbar mine. Then the crash came. I felt pretty rotten about it, but as I say, she never said a word. But it was a good day for us when Mr. Brodie turned up to explain that things were not so bad, and that he would be able to retrieve the most of what we had lost."

"I am glad for your sakes. So now the boys will go to their public schools," murmured Beatrice lamely.

"Not for a year or two. They're only little chaps, and we've two small girls besides. My wife has taken them to tea at her sister's at Morningside this afternoon, and I'm going across to fetch them home as soon as I've finished with an hour's tutoring I have to-night."

"Am I keeping you?" asked Beatrice quickly.

"No, Miss Heron. I'm glad to see you, and I could sit talking about Mr. Brodie for the rest of the evening and never come to the end of the good I could tell you. But I dare say all that is piper's news as you're a friend of his. I'm sure it is very kind of you to trouble about us."

"Oh, but—oh, but——" cried Beatrice painfully. "It has made me very unhappy to know that so many have suffered through the mistakes of us. I am hoping to get in touch with as many as possible to see whether I can be of any use. I am working myself."

"Mr. John Brodie told Carrie and me that, and we could not get over it. We think it splendid of you. Carrie will be sorry not to have seen you. Won't you come back another day? She is not very often out, unless in the park with the children."

"You love this little house?"

"I was born in it, ma'am, and my father was a school-master before me. Must you be going? Thank you for your visit, I'll tell Mr. Brodie you called this afternoon."

"Oh, no, please don't," she said confusedly, and then reflecting how foolish the objection must sound, she added: "Well, perhaps it doesn't matter. I dare say

you will have too many other things to talk of to remember about me."

Ballantyne did not forget however, and when he got home very late that night he tried to describe to his wife how queerly Brodie had looked at the sudden unexpected mention of Miss Heron's name. He had not pursued the subject of Miss Heron nor yet seemed much interested.

Beatrice slept very little that night. In thought she was pursuing the flying night mail across the darkened fields, trying to picture the traveller being rapidly borne away from Scotland, perhaps for ever. After that there was a great silence.

CHAPTER XX

JIMMY GRIER, in the throes of working for his finals, received a letter from his brother's wife which dulled his interest in his books.

It was the usual weekly letter which Alison never failed to write giving all the news of their family doings, and such items of Donald's work as she thought would be likely to interest his brother.

The Manse of Little Trinity was Jimmy's only home, and therefore no item of news was too insignificant to arouse and maintain his affectionate interest. His one complaint about Ailie's letters was that they were never long enough. On the few occasions when through illness or stress of household tasks she had turned the weekly letter over to Donald, his brother had promptly written to say the substitute was poor, and he would take no more of it. The Griers did not spread themselves to any great extent, either in speech or on paper; they belonged to that mysterious genus who have to be accepted as they are, and with whom many excellent women have to walk by faith all through their lives.

This letter in no way differed from the other letters, excepting that it contained the enchanting information that the family was going to Loch Long for the month of August, Donald having arranged to exchange pulpits there with a brother minister.

Alison looking forward to a change of scene, if not of occupation, hoped Jimmy would spend the whole month with them, and not take the post of *locum tenens* he had spoken of. He could only take it if he got through his examination, and then would burst upon the world fully fledged if lacking in experience. It was the end of the first week in July, and he would not know the results of the whole examination for a good fortnight. Meanwhile he

was at the last lap, having to appear for oral examination the next morning at ten o'clock. He was sitting in his little room in the top floor of a house in a dull, narrow street off the St. George's Road, with his feet on the table, and his head thrown back on the cushions of a shabby old leather chair, where the heads of many a student son of Scotland had rested in the same throes of work and study.

Jimmy's head was noble, his ruffled hair, which he had a trick of pushing about with his fingers when his brows were knit over a stiff bit, seemed to accentuate the breadth of his fine forehead, and his deep eyes had sombre lights in them, lit by the determination of young manhood to conquer all obstacles and reach the goal.

Having finished Alison's letter, he turned the page and on the back found the postscript which, like the scorpion's tail, contained a sting :

"If you could come home this week-end, Jimmy, it would be a good thing. Beatrice Heron asked me last night whether there was any chance of it. I could see she thought it necessary for you to come, so do, like a dear. I'll air your sheets in the garret on the off-chance."

Jimmy let the sheet flutter to the floor and shut his mouth in a long thin line. All the mobile sweetness died out of his face, and it became sad, dour, almost black with the rage and anxiety of his soul.

No surprise gripped him, because his inner consciousness had warned him since the last time he had been in Edinburgh that something had gone wrong with love's young dream, and that Ida had changed.

Jealous, with a jealousy which threatened to drive him to extreme lengths, of the men who had the privilege to live under the same roof with her, the poor lad had tried to overcome it and slog away at his books, realising that until he had something definite and worth while to offer he had not the right to say much. He wrote letters which so inadequately expressed the hunger and thirst of his soul, that Ida did not bother to read them. Her replies were short and scanty, lacking in every quality they ought to have possessed. Jimmy hugged his misery and his gnawing pain with all the tenacity of his

race and kind, but he made up his mind there and then to act on his sister-in-law's advice and go to Edinburgh the next afternoon to discover what had really gone wrong, and, if possible, set it to rights. He folded up his letter, thrust it in his breast pocket, and took up the discarded book he had thrown on the floor. Never had his dour power of concentration served him better. He simply shut the door on every disturbing thought and gave his mind absolutely to the task in hand. He had no intention of failing on the morrow, nay, it was his pride and hope to get through with flying colours. It was a case of "needs must" with him since everything was at stake.

He did not sit up late. After his scanty supper he went for a four-mile walk, came back and turned in, and slept soundly all night long. Bright and early he was up, ready for the final ordeal in which he acquitted himself so well as to earn the commendation of a particularly gruff and discouraging examiner from the London University.

"If you go on mixing your stuff with brains as you're doing to-day, my lad," he said, "we'll hear of you yet. Anyhow, you're through, and can go and take a good holiday on the head of it."

It was a piece of gratuitous information Jimmy had no right to expect, and it helped somewhat to lighten the gloom steadily growing about his heart. Having got rid of one burden, he was now at liberty to address himself to the next. He went to Edinburgh by the two o'clock train, arriving on his sister-in-law just about tea-time.

She met him with her ready smile.

"Good boy, I thought you'd come! Tell me first how did you get on this morning?"

"Oh, all right, I think. Made a mess of two or three of the questions, but others not so bad. They take a queer delight, some of these old fossils, in trying to trip up a chap, forgotten what it is to go through the mill, I suppose. But I think I may just warstle through by the skin of my teeth."

Alison, now inured to the fibre of the Griers, decided that Jimmy had come through with flying colours.

"Well, did you read the postscript to my letter?"

"Of course, why am I here?" he asked rather brusquely.

"Well, you'll need to go and look after Ida if you want her, Jimmy. She's drifting away."

"Drifting away, where?"

"At the moment in the direction of Germany, I'm afraid."

"That big fat boulder rolling in money and cheek; do you mean to say she's thinking seriously of him?"

"He's thinking seriously of her anyway. Beatrice was in last night and she was crying over it. It's a horrid business altogether. I've always disapproved of the boarding-house scheme with Mrs. Heron at the head, at least. If they'd taken one or two decayed gentlewomen, or business women, it would have been all right. The man on the spot has the chance of course, Jimmy, and Ida likes the things money can buy; we can't get away from it."

Jimmy said nothing, but his young face was set in a queer mask-like expression. Suddenly Alison put a leading question.

"Don't mind my asking, Jimmy, and you needn't answer unless you want to, but have you ever said anything to Ida Heron to—to let her know you care about her? Bee asked me that and of course I couldn't tell her, but I know what you Griers are. Wild horses can hardly draw from you anything about your feelings, and that German has a guileful tongue, a turn for compliments which go a long way with a girl like Ida."

Jimmy swallowed something in his throat. Even to so great a comrade and so true a friend as Alison it was a species of mild torture to speak of his feelings. He gave his head a queer jerk.

"Fine she knows. I as good as told her yon Sunday after her father was buried. We went for a walk out Granton way, and—and she, well she promised to wait for me."

"Well, unless you get in behind Weile, and kick him out, Jimmy, it's all U-P."

"I'll go round now and see her before he gets back from business."

"Take your tea first, my man ; then go and wash your face and put on your best clothes. It's a case of all the goods in the front window, Jimmy, believe me."

She sent him up to make himself smart while she went to boil an egg for his tea. She loved him dearly, but after what Beatrice had told her on the previous evening she did not believe he had a chance of winning Ida Heron. She was not sure that she was so very sorry, excepting for his pain, because she had no very high opinion of the younger Miss Heron, who differed from her sister in quality and outlook upon life as night differs from day. The children had not yet come in from school, and the little one was asleep after a riotous morning in the garden, so they had the tea table in its initial stages at least to themselves.

"I told you, didn't I, that Miss Heron had gone to live above the shop in George Street ? "

"Yes, you mentioned it in your last letter."

"She hoped everything from that, and getting Ida away from 'The Outlook.' But when it came to the pinch, she refused absolutely to go on the plea that it would be a shame for them both to leave Mrs. Heron."

"That was a pity, for Miss Heron would have acted as a kind of break," said Jimmy gloomily. "She told me last week end I was here that she didn't like the German."

"That's true enough, and if it hadn't been that old Madame has gone to America and that it was absolutely necessary for Beatrice to live on the premises and look after her house, I don't think she would have left Ida in Mrs. Heron's house. She is very anxious about it all, and it was she who egged me on to ask you to come through this week."

Jimmy addressed himself to his egg in gloomy silence.

"The trouble is, Ailie, that I've so little to offer against the beastly German," he began, but his sister-in-law held up a deprecating hand.

"That's the wrong tack entirely, Jimmy, you've got yourself to offer. Don't be too humble ; it doesn't pay. Take my advice and go to her with a high hand ; say you won't put up with this sort of treatment, and that she must choose between you."

"Quite good advice," said Jimmy shortly, "but not so easy to put into practice when you're up against it as I shall be presently, but I'll remember what you say."

He did remember it an hour later when he called at "The Outlook" about half-past six and asked to see his sweetheart.

Mrs. Heron opened the door to him, Lizzie being out for the afternoon and evening.

"Oh, it is you, Mr. Grier!" she said, not coldly, but with a kind of careless indifference. "Yes, Ida is in, but I don't know whether you can see her. Come inside and I'll ask her. When did you come from Glasgow?"

"Only this afternoon," Jimmy answered as he crossed the threshold and laid his hat and stick on the hall table.

"It's rather an awkward time to call, for we're dining at seven to-night, as a party of us are going to a concert in the Music Hall at eight o'clock. Sit down, and I'll go up and tell her you are here."

She showed him into the little drawing-room about which hung now a perpetual odour of stale cigars. Smoking was permitted everywhere in the house, though Mr. Heron had been very particular that it should not be obtruded in the room usually associated with feminine occupation. No nice distinction of that sort was observed now, indeed, the complaint might easily have been made that there was no privacy in the house at all.

Jimmy sat-twirling his thumbs, gloom on his forehead, his eyes full of sombre fire. In about ten minutes the door opened and Ida appeared wearing a low-necked black frock with a bunch of pink carnations tucked in the belt. His face flushed all over as he sprang up to meet her, but she merely offered him a cool little hand.

"How do you do, Jimmy. I was surprised when Lotta told me who had called. You never said a word in your last letter about coming through this week-end, in fact, I thought you were in the throes of your finals."

"I got through the last bout this morning, and came off all of a sudden. You're going out to-night, Mrs. Heron says. When can I see you?"

She turned a curb bracelet round and round on her slim white arm looking desperately uncomfortable.

"I don't know, Jimmy, sometime to-morrow or Sunday perhaps; I'm afraid it will need to be Sunday, for I'm going into the country on a motor to-morrow afternoon."

"Who with?" asked Jimmy darkly.

"A friend," she answered evasively.

"That German bounder, I suppose," he said wrathfully.

She made no answer for a moment though her eyes flashed fire.

"You needn't call people names, Jimmy."

"But I won't have it. I forbid you to go motoring with him. You can come motoring with me instead."

"Oh can I? Have you come into a fortune then? Don't look so furious. I'm not going alone. Lotta will be there and another man; we'll be four in all."

"But I don't want you to go!" cried the unhappy Jimmy. "I've come all the way from Glasgow for the purpose of seeing you, and you've simply got to come out with me. I've got all sorts of things to say to you."

"Sorry I can't, not till Sunday. I'll meet you outside on Sunday if you like, and we can go for a walk. I don't want you to come here again."

"What time on Sunday?"

"What time? Oh, I don't know; afternoon, say three o'clock. You'll have to go to church, won't you, in the morning?"

"No I needn't. Can't you come out in the morning? I'll call here for you at eleven o'clock."

"Oh well, if you want to," she said discontentedly, for her quick ear had caught the click of a key in the front door. "I'm sorry I'll have to go now, for Lizzie Anderson is out and we've got only a temporary woman in the kitchen and I've got to superintend her dishing up dinner. Sorry to seem so ungracious, Jimmy, but really you've chosen the most awkward hour of all the day to call, and I've got things to do in the house."

Jimmy rose to his feet feeling cheap and unwelcome.

"Sorry I've intruded to such an extent. Once I could call at any hour," he said rather bitterly. "Good night. Don't trouble to see me out. I'll call on Sunday morning then at eleven o'clock."

"All right, good night, Jimmy—sorry—but it had just to happen like this. I'm not to blame," she said, thawing a little at sight of his miserable face.

As he passed out he had to encounter Gustav Weile in the hall divesting himself of a light overcoat for which a slight spell of east wind had provided the excuse. He looked at him sourly and yet critically, hating him with a hatred which surprised and disquieted him. Weile smiled upon him blandly and even turned aside to do him the courtesy of opening the door.

"A lovely evening, is it not, but a trifle cold," he said.

Jimmy merely snorted and walked out. He was in no mood to return to the Manse of Little Trinity, or to meet his brother's questioning or his sister-in-law's unspoken but quite palpable sympathy. He turned down towards the sea first of all, and then with a curious impulse turned again townwards, suddenly conceiving the plan of attending the concert for the purpose of watching Ida and the party of which she was a unit. That it would add to his pain he was only too well aware, but his disposition at the moment goaded him to learn the worst. Walking all the way, his long legs soon covered the distance and brought him to the Music Hall a few minutes before eight o'clock. He saw from the bills that it was a Chamber Concert of high-class music and the carriages and motors containing music lovers for the reserved seats were rolling up to the entrance and depositing their occupants. He entered the vestibule, paid for a cheap seat and made his way to it. When he reached it, he found he had a quite good view of the best seats, where doubtless the party from "The Outlook" would be accommodated. The overture was being played however before those for whom he was watching appeared. Then it was only the German, looking handsome in his florid style, accompanied by Ida alone.

The sight was one to make a jealous lover gnash his teeth, and the music had no charm to soothe him. He simply leaned forward watching this pair who seemed devoted to one another, at least there was no doubt about Weile's devotion. Jimmy noted with disgust and with a kind of exultation that he had a bald spot on his head,

and looked middle-aged, even elderly, as if good living had wreaked its vengeance on him.

Long before the performance ended he had had his fill, and slipped out, tired, dispirited and without hope. Poor Jimmy, who had no experience at all of women, and who had poured the virgin treasures of his young manhood at Ida Heron's feet, thought the end of all things had come.

And yet at the back of his mind lurked a faint hope that even yet he might smooth things. It was almost ten when he reached home and Alison met him with an expectant look on her face hoping much from his long absence.

Donald rose to greet him, and for the time being Alison's questioning was stayed. He rather avoided her eyes, and talked a great deal as he ate the bit of supper she had put by for him, giving his brother much information about the examinations though he had for the moment really lost all interest in them. But it was better to make talk and to keep them off the one subject regarding which he felt himself at the moment unfit to talk. Alison went to bed at the usual hour without having had her curiosity satisfied, and she was far too skilled in handling hurt souls to intrude by questioning. She rather concluded from something about Jimmy that he had not met with a very good reception at "The Outlook."

The brothers sat up talking till after midnight, but Ida Heron's name was not mentioned. When Donald went up to bed his wife awoke out of her first sleep to ask him whether Jimmy had said anything about Ida Heron.

"Not a word, Ailie. He has more serious things to think about. He has no room just now for anything but the exams. I think he's done well on the whole, probably much better than he expects."

"Oh Donald Grier, you're even more dense than usual! I only wish I could think you were speaking the truth," she said ruefully. "What do you suppose Jimmy came for this time?"

"To tell us about the exams. of course. I tell you

there isn't anything else in his mind just now. He'll be better for a holiday, poor chap, and I've been trying to persuade him to come to Loch Long with us."

"Good night, Donald Grier, your lack of imagination is beyond belief, but I'm glad you're like that ; it saves yourself a lot of trouble," murmured Alison and closed her eyes.

CHAPTER XXI

NEXT morning about eight o'clock, as Mrs. Grier, a very neat figure in a blue cotton overall and a fascinating dust cap, was polishing the brass handles on the front door, the postman came whistling up the garden path.

She gave him a pleasant good morning as she took a small handful of letters from him, asking kindly for his wife and little family, all of whom were well known to her. After he had gone, cheered by her kindly greeting, she leaned against the lintel and sorted out the letters, coming presently on a small, thick one addressed to her brother-in-law in handwriting she had no difficulty in recognising as Ida Heron's.

"I don't like this," she said to herself as she eyed it suspiciously. "I don't like it at all. What do folks living practically in the next street want to write like that for? I'm sure it spells trouble."

It so disquieted her that she had no heart to inspect the rest of the correspondence, though she had a healthy human interest in the postman's bag as a rule.

She laid it on the hall table, apart from the others, and each time her eye fell on it during her dusting process, her misgiving deepened.

"Poor boy, he's going through the mill just now, what with exams. and things, and having no money, and all the rest of it! But this is going to be the worst yet. But I'm dead sure if it's what I think it is, it'll turn out for the best in the long run."

Jimmy slept late, and she did not go near his room. Well she knew how many hours he burned the midnight oil in his cheerless little Glasgow lodging, and that his young strong body needed all the rest it could get. Saturday was a high day as well as a holiday to the Manse bairns, and that day they had been promised a picnic

on the little bit of pebbly beach about two miles along the shore which was all they could muster in the way of sands. About half-past ten they departed in glorious sunshine in charge of Katie, the eldest girl, and a school friend of slightly maturer years, wheeling the little one and the eatables in the old perambulator. Kissed and blessed at the gate, their mother promised to come along later in the day and bring them home. When she stepped back into the shadows of the house she saw Jimmy on the landing, and gave him what she hoped was a bright good-morning.

"I'm ashamed, Ailie, why didn't you rout me out?" he called down the stairs. "I couldn't believe my eyes when I woke up and saw it was ten o'clock."

"Why should I rout you out? It's sleep you're needing, my dear. I've just been getting the bairns off to their picnic. They're hoping you'll join them later."

"So I will, too, if you'd only wakened me I'd have been going with them now."

He was downstairs by this time, and his eye immediately fell on the letter lying face upwards on the hall table.

Alison did not look at him as he picked it up, but murmuring something about getting his breakfast, went through to the kitchen.

Jimmy thrust the letter into his pocket and stalked gloomily into the dining-room, in no haste to open it. Like Alison he sensed trouble, and shrank from it. When in about ten minutes' time his sister-in-law came in with the teapot and a bit of fresh toast, she found him poring over the advertisement columns of the *Scotsman*.

"There are some very good foreign berths offering, Ailie," he said suddenly. "I've a very good mind, if I get through, to have a sea trip."

"Oh, do! It would do you no end of good," she said heartily.

"It has one disadvantage, it sometimes creates the taste for the sea. I've heard of chaps who couldn't stop off it after they'd made a voyage or two. Ships' doctors are a class by themselves."

"I know that, but you're not registering in that class,

Jimmy. It's a great surgeon you're going to be, with a neat, but not gaudy, brass plate on a shiny door, and a waiting-room crammed with patients waiting for consultation at anything from three to five guineas a head. I've got it all mapped out for you, boy, and you've got to live up to it!"

He smiled and turned to the table, and when Alison had poured out his tea and directed his attention to the brawn which was one of her culinary triumphs, she stood a moment with her alert, capable hands on her hips, looking at him. But as he didn't say anything she went off to air and make the beds, hoping for the best.

Jimmy, with a touch of that dour determination which characterised most of his thoughts and actions, ate a very good breakfast before he opened the letter. Then he carried out the tray to the kitchen and even essayed to fold up the tablecloth, but, finding it going awry, re-spread it before he carefully slit the flap of the envelope and read every word.

It began without any address on the top of the page.

"Dear Jimmy,

"I'm writing this near twelve o'clock, but I shall finish it in time to run out to the pillar box at the corner so that you get it in the morning.

"I am very sorry to have to write it. I hoped you would have guessed from my letters, or rather because I've written so very few, that I had changed my mind, and that now I think what we said down there on the shore that day when I wasn't normal at all after our terrible upset at home was all a mistake. I soon found out that I couldn't care for you in the way you wanted, and besides, we have to have common sense, Jimmy. Looking forward, I don't see an earthly chance of our ever being able to marry and settle down, even in the most modest comfort. I'm sure we should both be grey and old before we ever could get a house together. I could never get over your telling me that you even owed money to your brother Donald, that just made it worse.

"If I were to be so foolish as to marry you, I'd just be a clog on your career, and you'd probably live to curse

me, and then we should both wish we'd never been born. To tell you the honest truth, Jimmy, I'm afraid of being poor all my life. I've had enough of it here to last me. I'm deadly sick of the makeshifts and the planning and never having a penny of my own. I've nothing excepting what I get from Lotta, and she's not been too generous, especially lately. So I'm going to quit. I expect you may have guessed that I'm going to marry a man who can give me all the things I want, and besides, I like him quite well. Whatever people may say about the Germans, they have a different way with them. Scotchmen are so dull and cold, and afraid of ever committing themselves, or of giving a girl a bit of praise or encouragement. That day on the shore, Jimmy, you looked as if you were getting out your own death warrant, instead of asking me to marry you. I've had enough of the dark side of life. I'm out for a little sunshine and brightness before I'm too old to enjoy it.

"Don't think I'm not feeling having to write all this. I feel it so much I daren't even read it over. Forgive me, Jimmy, if I've caused you any pain. I'm sure you'll meet a nice girl who will value you for yourself and be a far greater help to you than I could ever have been. I know I'm nothing but a selfish little beast, but then, we can't help the way we're made."

She ended abruptly there, merely signing her name. Jimmy's face did not alter, he folded up the letter very slowly and quietly and put it back in his pocket. Then he laced on his boots which stood ready for him on the hearth rug. Presently, hearing Alison's step on the stair, he went out and followed her into the kitchen. She never forgot his expression as he stood there, looking grim and rather pale, with his big eyes set in shadowy hollows.

"I've had my marching orders, Ailie. Read that!" Alison slightly shrunk back.

"Jimmy, do you think I'd better? Won't you mind after? Just tell me what she says. I was afraid of it when I saw the letter. I would have liked to stuff it into the kitchen fire," she added viciously.

"I want you to read it. It can't hurt more than it does."

Alison took the offered sheets and quickly made herself mistress of what was written thereon. Her eyes flashed, and she handed them back to him with a little stamp of the foot.

"A heartless little wretch, Jimmy, and you're well rid of her! But she won't lack punishment! She'll get it, married to that German beast. Oh, how could she, laddie, when she might have had you!"

Alison began to cry just then, and queer, burning drops rose in sympathy in Jimmy's eyes. As this sort of exhibition was impossible he turned awkwardly and sharply.

"I'll go out and walk it off, Ailie. Likely as not I'll come up with the kids down at the shore and help them to build their picnic fire. Don't expect me in at dinner time, and don't worry or cry about it, it isn't worth it."

"Oh, but Jimmy, you look rather awful, you won't—you won't——"

"I won't blow my brains out, or jump off the chain pier, or anything idiotic like that! I'll stand up to my gruel, it's a pretty hot dose, that's all, but I dare say I'll get over it."

Alison continued to sob quietly after Jimmy had left the house, enraged because Donald had gone off early to catch his train for the south country parish where he was supplying a pulpit next day.

She hurried through her work and got down to the beach by half-past one, only to find the children as happy as kings and queens, paddling and building castles out of the rough sand and pebbles. But there was not a sign of Uncle Jimmy.

He had thought better of joining the children, and had gone for a long tramp, climbing to the very top of Arthur's Seat, from which he seemed to look down from the edge of the world.

About two o'clock he descended again, had some light refreshment in a teashop and made his way to the house of Madame Theodore in George Street. It was not to talk of his own dismissal, but to ask Beatrice whether

nothing could be done to save Ida from a marriage in which it seemed impossible to believe she could find any happiness.

The business premises were closed, but when he climbed the inside stair and knocked at the door of the flat Miss Heron herself, dressed in her outdoor garb, opened the door to him. She started back in complete amazement at sight of Jimmy Grier, but had a warm welcome for him.

"Why, Jimmy, I thought you were in the middle of the finals in Glasgow! Where have you dropped from?"

"Arthur's Seat at the minute, the exams. are over," he answered. "I rather want to speak to you for a minute, but if you're going out——"

"I'm only going down home to see them," she said. "There isn't any hurry. Come in, I'm most awfully glad to see you."

Thus welcomed, Jimmy crossed the threshold of the cosy little French flat, and was ushered into the sunny little sitting-room.

"I don't think you need go down there just yet. They're out motoring to-day!"

"Oh, are they? You've seen them, then?"

"I saw them—yes—last night, just for a minute. I've come to show you this."

It may seem strange that Jimmy Grier could show to two women in one day the letter which had put an end to love's young dream for him. But it was a letter so queerly impersonal, so heartless, that it had the odd effect of deadening all his faculties, and besides, his honest desire at the moment was to try and save Ida from herself. There are some men like that, but only a very few, men who can rise above the mere personal aspect of affairs and judge from the passionless, impersonal standpoint. It does not mean that their feelings are less warm and poignant than those of other men, but merely that they are cast in finer mould.

Beatrice leaned against the edge of the table and read the letter through, her mouth setting hardly, her eyes tingling with a bitter moisture.

"I was afraid of it," she said in a low voice, slightly

broken. "Jimmy, I'm sorry for you. What she has thrown away! I was so proud and happy, hoping that you understood one another, for I know what you are and what you are going to be. And now——"

"Can't we save her?" asked Jimmy rather thickly, more moved than he had been by his sister-in-law's outburst. "We can't—we can't let her marry this German bounder!"

"How are we to help it, Jimmy? She's of age, and very determined."

"Oh, but we must try. You don't know," he said with difficulty, "what they are! I've come across some of them in Glasgow. The way they talk and think about women makes my gorge rise. And he's twice her age, and I'd not like to read the record of his experience or his past. Won't you try?"

"Of course I will. I'll have it out with her to-day, if I've to stop all night at 'The Outlook' to see her."

"I'm surprised that Mrs. Heron should have taken people like that into her house."

"You need not be," said Beatrice calmly. "I hoped for a while that it might be Lotta that he would marry. They have had some acquaintance before, but I don't think Lotta is pleased about it. She spoke quite snappily about Ida the very last day I saw her. She came up here one afternoon and had tea with me, and I could see she was nursing a grievance."

"From that letter," said Jimmy gloomily, "apparently they are properly engaged. She definitely says she's going to marry him."

"He has tempted her with all the things money can buy, Jimmy, but I'm afraid, desperately afraid. I wouldn't marry Gustav Weile if he were the last man on earth. There's something about him that makes me creep."

"I don't think Scotch women should marry foreigners, or that anybody should marry out of their own country," said Jimmy stolidly. "But now, I mustn't keep you."

"I'm in no hurry, there isn't any use going down if she is out with Weile in his car. He has a house in Leith, Jimmy, and only shut it up because he had been

having trouble with housekeepers, so Mrs. Heron told me. So if they really are engaged, I don't suppose they'll be waiting long."

"It's horrible," said Jimmy between his teeth. Perhaps after you've talked to *her*——"

Beatrice shook her head.

"I haven't much hope. Lately she's got very touchy about everything. I can hardly say a word to her. The Herons are down on their luck, and no mistake! Now, do tell me all about yourself. Do you think you've got through?"

"Yes, I think so."

"And what will you do now, then?"

"I was saying to Donald's wife this morning, I thought I'd take a voyage, or maybe two. I'm jolly tired, and this, of course, isn't going to do me any good."

"I think that would be a quite splendid idea," said Beatrice, her eyes full of a soft and kindly interest. She saw that Ida had dealt Jimmy Grier a cruel blow, and though in the long run he might get over it, in the meantime it had robbed him of the zest of life.

"How are you getting on here, Miss Heron?" he asked. "It's a nice wee house this. I've never seen a room with gilt furniture in it before."

Beatrice smiled a little.

"It's dear Madame Theodore's idea of French furnishing. She's very nearly as fond of France as she is of Scotland, and if she hadn't been urged by her sister to go out to America, she would have gone to Picardy to spend the summer."

"Queer what things happen to folk, but you haven't told me yet whether you like the life."

"I like the work very much, handling beautiful stuffs, and trimming really nice hats. If I hadn't to meet the people I might like it better, but I try to regard them as mere pegs to hang my creations on."

Jimmy had a very hazy idea what she meant, but understood, and heartily sympathised with her dislike of people. He was built like that himself.

"And are you going to keep on at it, do you think?"

"Why, of course. Madame Theodore has made a

snug little fortune, and it's what I mean to do, too. I shall never rest till I've paid my share of the money that was lost when the crash came."

"Oh, is that how you're feeling, it's a fine idea. I hope you'll win through, but of course you will. And it's suiting you—you look ever so much better."

"This is a very healthy little house, so high up we can imagine even we smell the sea sometimes. I love it. If only I could have got Ida here with me, and she would have waited till you had a home to offer her, I would have been quite happy."

"Do you ever see the Brodies now?"

Beatrice coloured slightly.

"I haven't for some time. Mrs. Brodie and her daughter have left Scotland, and are somewhere on the south coast. I think they've let Linnorie, furnished as it stands."

"And what about the sons, two weren't there?"

"Yes, one is at school in England."

"And the eldest one, abroad somewhere is he?"

The flame mounted higher in Beatrice's face, but if Jimmy noticed it he gave no sign.

"He is in the Straits Settlements, I believe."

"I thought Alison said he had been home since it all happened."

"Yes."

"Did you see him?"

"I did, more than once. Won't you let me get you a cup of tea, Jimmy? I'd love to. I've let our old maid out for the afternoon. I wish you could have met her. She's been with Madame Theodore a long time, and she thinks she owns, not only the flat, but the business, and the whole earth. She is threatening to retire every week, but still stops on."

"One of the old type, but I'm glad you've got somebody reliable here with you. It would be very lonely for you, and not particularly safe."

"Oh, safe enough! I'm not afraid to live alone. Often, when I've had a trying day in the show-rooms, I wonder why so many useless people are born into the world."

"We must suppose they are of use to somebody," said Jimmy, with a slightly melancholy smile, which made him look very young, and rather pathetic.

"Well, if you won't have tea or anything, let's go down to Trinity together. I haven't seen Alison for over a fortnight, so unless you prefer your own company, let's have a joy ride on a tram."

Jimmy assented delightedly, they locked up the house, and went out together, feeling perfectly happy and at home in one another's company. When they got to the car terminus, Beatrice decided that she would go home first.

"Tell Alison I'll be round later. Perhaps I'll find Lotta in. I'd like to hear her views on the subject."

"All right, I'll tell Alison."

"And Jimmy, don't worry or fret too much about this. I have the feeling at the back of my mind, somehow, that it's going to be a good thing for you, and that far better things are in store."

"It's good of you to try and buck up a chap," said Jimmy, and blinked his eyes as he turned them away, after wringing the kind hand she offered.

"By Jove, and they say she hasn't got any heart, that she's proud and stuck-up, and all the rest of it!" he said to himself, as he walked away in the opposite direction. "One of the best she is, nobody could be kinder, and a chap could depend on her, too. She wouldn't play it low down on him the way her sister has done. I wonder, now, why she coloured up when I asked about Brodie."

He was left wondering, but the impression that there was something behind it all lingered in his mind.

CHAPTER XXII

SILENCE and peace brooded over the little turreted house with which so much of the later and more sordid history of the Herons was bound up. Beatrice noticed as she opened the wicket gate that the narrow strip of garden ground was choked with weeds, and that the few rose trees she had planted from shoots out of the sunk rose garden at Linnorie were bravely blooming among the hostile growths. In some odd way it seemed to her a parallel with their own lives, in which she was striving to keep alive the old tradition of honour and service for God and humanity.

Lizzie Henderson, alone in the house and with her eyes glued to the rim of the dining-room blind, saw her come and ran ecstatically to the door to greet her.

"Oh, Miss Bee, I'm gled to see ye! But there's naeboddy in. I've been my lane since eleven o'clock this mornin'."

"Have you, Lizzie? Well, never mind, it would give you a slack day," said Beatrice, smiling kindly as she offered the faithful servant her hand. "How are you? Getting quite fat, I think, and your cheeks are rosy."

"Oh, I'm fine. I wish I could say you was fat, Miss Bee."

"But I've just been told I have improved in that respect by no less a person than Mr. James Grier."

"Oh, him; he was here last nicht, I believe, but his number's up!" said Lizzie enigmatically as she closed the door on her adored Miss Beatrice and followed her into the dining-room where the afternoon sun lay in a golden flood. The house was well kept, but the smell of tobacco and cigar smoke was everywhere, lingering stalely about curtains and upholstery, and a very large

spittoon of a pattern not known in Scotland stood in a corner by the fire-place.

"They're a' oot. Miss Ida gaed away in the motor-car wi' Maister Weile before lunch, and the mistress she's oot too, but I don't know where. She's that cross thae days, you're feared to open your mooth."

"Oh," said Beatrice absently. "So no one will be in to tea?"

"No, but I'll get yours. You'll wait to see them, of course; this being Saturday your shop will be shut."

Lizzie had no fine words with which to embroider Miss Heron's occupation, nor did she differentiate between a costumier's salon and an ordinary shop. To her both were places where you could buy things for money, and in her secret heart she deplored the necessity which had driven Miss Beatrice into such a strange occupation. She was ready to defend, however, where she neither understood nor approved.

Beatrice smiled broadly.

"Yes, my shop's shut, Lizzie. What a boon Saturday and Sunday are to working folks!"

"Aye are they, too, when working folks can get a bit o' rest. But Sunday's the heid day here, and I dinna mind the time when onybody gaed to the kirk. I wonder Maister Grier disna come and gi'e them a dressin' doon. Thae Germans of course naebody expects to do the right thing. Puir things, they canna help it. I expect there's nae kirks in Germany."

"On the contrary, Lizzie, Germany is full of churches, same as Scotland."

"Aye weel, the lot we've got dinna bother them," said Lizzie brusquely. "I'll just be gettin' your tea. I had a meenit or twa, so I bakit a scone this mornin' and there's some good shortbreid."

She danced away and Beatrice sat down, feeling no inclination to move about the house which no longer belonged to her. Ida had taken possession of her eyrie, from which Beatrice had removed only one or two treasured possessions, and she had no desire to pry into her sister's room. She sat down in an old and comfortable rocking-chair and gently moved to and fro, feeling

the rhythm soothing. From the kitchen came Lizzie Anderson's blithe whistle, her only way of expressing exuberance of feelings. She could not sing, and had a queer little, rather hoarse voice consequent upon some throat trouble nobody had paid attention to in her childhood. But it had not affected her whistling notes, which were as clear as a laverock's in the lift.

"You whistle as well as ever, Lizzie," said Beatrice with a smile, when she appeared with the tea-tray.

"No' so much as I used to do. The mistress rages on me whiles and says it gi'es her a headache. There's plenty singing goes on here, Miss Bee, every nicht when they're no oot, it's like a concert. Weile——"

"Mister Weile, Lizzie," corrected Beatrice softly.

"Well, Maister Weile, he's a grand player, and has a voice like a big bass drum. An' the wee yin plays the fiddle, and Maister Meikle he's learnin' the flute, so we have grand ongauns. Whiles it's fair deaving, and as they're at it long efter I'm in my bed, I whiles feel like chappin' on the floor. Come an' sit in to your tea then, Miss Bee. I suppose I should go back to the kitchen, but you're a sicht for sair een."

"Don't go away then," said Beatrice encouragingly. So Lizzie leaned up against the lintel of the half-open door surveying her adored and only real mistress with the utmost satisfaction not unmingled with a certain pathos. Suddenly she burst out :

"Oh, Miss Bee, it was a peety ye ever gaed away to live up there abune your shop. You're needed here. Things are no richt an' whiles I'm feared aboot that Maister Weile."

"Are you, Lizzie? I've been afraid too, but now I think we must just try and make the best of it, for there seems to be no doubt that Miss Ida is going to marry him."

Lizzie's face betrayed the absolute dismay, almost amounting to horror, which she felt.

"Marry that man, oor Miss Ida—oh, she'll never do that !"

"I am afraid she will."

"And throw ower the minister's brither? Oh, certy,

what can she be thinkin' on? I'm but a servant lassie, brocht up in the gutter, and I never would ha'e been where I am the day but for Mrs. Grier and you, Miss Bee. But I'm tellin' ye. I wouldn't marry that man; I'd throw myself off the chain pier first."

"Is it because he is German, Lizzie, and that you don't understand him?"

Lizzie shook an emphatic, almost a desperate, head. "No, no, I suppose there micht be, here an' there, a good man in Germany. I've naething against the country. I've never seen it. But he's a bad yin, Miss Bee, a bad yin through an' through, an' if oor Miss Ida marries him she'll rue it, only wance, an' that'll be a' her days."

It was Beatrice's own opinion and her heart sank to zero.

"But you'll stop it, Miss Bee?" cried Lizzie, with a high note of confidence in her voice. "You'll tell her no' to do it."

"I might tell her twenty times, Lizzie, but I am really powerless to prevent it. Has Mrs. Heron spoken to you about it?"

Lizzie hesitated a moment, then, moved by the theme under discussion, decided to make a clean breast.

"Aye has she, Miss Bee; that's what's makin' her so crabbit there's nae livin' wi' her. She's wantin' him for hersel', an' it's a peety she couldna get him. She would be able to stand up to him, and if she couldna—well, it wouldna matter."

"Oh, I think you must be mistaken, Lizzie, and we'd better not talk any more about it," said Beatrice, suddenly recalled to the impropriety of discussing such matters with the little servant maid, who, while wholly devoted to the name of Heron, was too young and inexperienced to be listened to. Beatrice forgot that the children of the slum, while ignorant in many directions, acquire through hard necessity an extraordinary clearness of vision, an almost merciless discrimination regarding both persons and things. Having had to fight with wolfish eagerness for the scraps of life, all their wits are sharpened to an extraordinary degree. Nothing that went on in "The Outlook" escaped Lizzie Anderson, and she had a genius for putting two and two together.

Before Lizzie could answer a key clicked in the outer door, and presently Mrs. Heron walked in. She betrayed no surprise at sight of Beatrice, though she glared suspiciously at Lizzie with a glance which dismissed her to her own domain.

"Well, have you been pumping the slavey?" she said ungraciously to Beatrice, with one of those touches of ineradicable vulgarity which never failed to set Beatrice's teeth on edge.

"I hope you're quite well, Lotta," said she a trifle stiffly. "You look tired. Have you been walking a long way?"

"I have. All the trams were packed; people trying to get a breath of the sea air, I suppose, this stifling afternoon. I'd forgotten what it would be like or I would have tried for a train down from Waverley."

"Were you up in town?"

"I was," said Lotta, drawing in her chair to get a refreshing cup of tea. She did not explain that she had been consulting a fortune-teller who lived in one of the mean streets off the South Bridge and that she had gotten no encouragement or good cheer from her.

"We haven't seen you for a long time, but you look flourishing enough. The dibs rolling in, I suppose? You've got the smug look that seems to suggest it."

"We're very slack now. Most people have got all they want for the summer and are going away, and the staff are getting holidays now in rotation."

"Are you to get any holidays?"

Beatrice shook her head. "I have nowhere to go. I shall have to content myself with a day here and there. I wish I'd gone out to Linnorie this afternoon. It will be lovely there in the sunshine."

Lotta sniffed and spread butter on a scone with a vicious hand. "Everybody to their taste. What I'd like to do would be to clear out of Edinburgh—I've always thought it a stinking hole—and open a small select boarding-house at some English resort. There's money in that. This is too small, and I've got in with the wrong set."

Beatrice forbore to say that her paying guests were entirely her own choosing. Then Lotta went on :

" It's a pity you ever left us. You might have been a brake on your sister and prevented her making a fool of herself as she has done with Mr. Weile."

Beatrice felt her throat going suddenly dry. She wondered whether Lotta had grown more impossible or whether it was that she, at a further distance than when the one roof sheltered them, saw her now with a more merciless clearness.

" I came down to speak about that to-day, Lotta. I'm very troubled about it."

" Troubled about it ! I shouldn't have thought it ! " cried Lotta with a shrill hard note in her voice. " You've left me to bear the whole brunt. I've had a pretty hard fight, I can tell you, to keep the good name of my house."

At that monstrous suggestion the flame sprang in Beatrice Heron's cheek. " You had the remedy in your own hands, Lotta. You could have given Mr. Weile notice."

" Oh, could I, and pray where did you suppose our bread and butter, your sister's and mine, would have come from ? He's a gentleman ; he pays handsomely. He was all right till Ida began to set her cap at him, playing up to his kindness, sponging off him for chocolates and theatres and motor rides. I tell you I'm deadly sick of it, and now you're here I may as well say what I've been meaning to write to you for some time, that you had better come and take your sister away, and keep her under lock and key at your shop."

Beatrice, determined not to be drawn into a vulgar brawl, though the temptation to retaliate was very great, said quietly :

" But I don't think it matters much now. I'm afraid she's going to marry him."

" Oh, you are, are you ? But I can tell you different. Men like Mr. Weile don't marry raw creatures like Ida. They like a woman of experience who can talk to them about the things they are interested in. Mr. Weile was my friend ; he came here for my sake, shutting up his own splendid house because he knew he would be more

comfortable here. And everything would have gone on happily and smoothly if Ida hadn't butted in."

Beatrice sat quite helpless, as she might feel and act in the swirl of some resistless tide. Of what use was it to argue or bring forward any counter-statements to the wild ones chasing one another from her lips? While Beatrice, knowing the woman and making every allowance for what was evidently the wrath of personal disappointment, felt acutely wretched lest there might be just a modicum of truth in her maunderings, sat back wearily closing her eyes. But no softening came on Lotta's face. The accumulation of anger, disappointment and indignation seemed likely, now it was finding vent, to overwhelm both her and her unhappy listener.

"I wish I'd never seen your father. I was a far happier woman before he pestered me into marrying him, leaving a first-class situation and all the real friends who understood me. He misled me, that's what he did. He spoke as if even he might get Linnorie back some day, and I'd be its mistress. And what did I find when I came here, that you were as poor as church mice and as proud and high as a church steeple. I tell you it was an awful downcome for me, and I daren't do this or that, because I happened to have changed my name for your august one. And then look at the shame and disgrace at the end! We'll never be able to get over that or to live it down. I'm ashamed to give my name in a decent shop now. People won't forget it, I assure you."

Beatrice suddenly clapped the palms of her hands over her ears. "Don't let us get into that painful groove, Lotta," she said imploringly. "It can't do the smallest good. Father is dead, and most decent people try to speak well of the dead."

"It's all very well for you. By some method I've never got to the bottom of you've got the right side of that rich old dressmaker, and I dare say are practising the same arts your sister has practised here."

Beatrice sprang to her feet, her eyes flashing, her cheeks pale with a righteous anger. "I refuse to listen to you, Lotta. You are beside yourself with anger. I won't come back here until you apologise for what you

have said about Ida and what you are now saying about me."

Lotta laughed shrilly. "You pride's easily touched in some directions, but as thick as an elephant's hide in others. It's just as it happens to strike you, or rather what side your bread's going to be buttered on. A little truth won't hurt you, it might in the long run do you good. You Herons have held your heads pretty high and given yourself plenty of airs, God knows, but when we get down to the bedrock of things you're just common folk—common folk, do you hear?—and no better than you should be! Get something for nothing, but don't work for it; that, as far as I'm able to judge, is the creed of your class and kind! I tell you they make me tired, and in a decent world there's no room for you. Your day's over!"

At that moment there was the quick rumble of a car, and it came belching up to the gate making a most timely diversion. Both stepped back with one accord to the sitting-room, and through the curtains Lotta beheld Ida being helped to alight with great solicitude by Gustav Weile. Her face became almost livid as she turned to Beatrice.

"Come and see for yourself. Quite shameless they are now, riding about together and not caring what the street sees or thinks."

Beatrice did not move. She was feeling sick, physically and mentally, every fibre of her being revolted by the unhappy scene she had just endured and fear of the possible one to come.

The door opened, and Gustav Weile, bland, smiling, the picture of prosperity, satisfaction and presumably happiness, ushered in Ida, looking lovely in her beautiful half-mourning, with a veil thrown well back from her softly flushed face.

"Ah, Miss Heron, this is a happy coincidence. Permit me to salute you and introduce to you my wife—Madame Weile."

CHAPTER XXIII

It was a dramatic moment, which no one enjoyed save the man who might be called the principal actor in it. He stood with a peculiar smirk of satisfaction on his florid face, surveying the consternation of the two women, who looked as if a bomb had been thrown into the little room. Weile's announcement partook of the nature of a bomb, because though Mrs. Heron and Beatrice had been discussing the probability of Ida's marriage with the German, the sudden conversion of probability into concrete fact was staggering to both. Lotta clasped agitated hands and glared upon them with anger and indignation, while into Beatrice's eyes crept ineffable sadness. Beside her middle-aged husband Ida looked a mere child, and at the back of her radiant excitement could be discerned a certain apprehension. She fixed her eyes imploringly on her sister's face.

"Oh, Bee, won't you wish me joy?"

Beatrice tried to articulate something, but no sound came.

Lotta leaped into the breach.

"I suppose you think you've done a very fine thing, bringing this kind of scandal on a decent house, where mourning is not even over?"

Ida shrank before the concentrated hatred in her step-mother's voice and look. Weile answered for her, and there was no shrinking in his manner. According to his standard he had nothing to explain, apologise for, or be unhappy about. He had obtained his heart's desire, a young wife of British birth, and he cared for naught else.

"Sorry we do not meet with your approval, Mrs. Heron," he said, and his light-blue eyes behind the pince-nez had a strange cold glitter. "But we can

dispense with it perhaps, and we shall not inflict ourselves upon you further."

"You won't; I'll take care of that. You can go up now and gather your rubbish together," she said, pointing the finger of scorn at Ida, "and clear out of this house."

Ida took a step backward involuntarily, Beatrice put out her hand and touched her arm protectingly. With a little shuddering breath Ida crept nearer and hid her face a moment on her sister's tall shoulder.

"Be quiet, Lotta," said Beatrice, almost sternly. "It is not seemly. The thing is done; we must now make the best of it."

They were hardly words to commend themselves to the new-made bridegroom, who had the highest possible opinion of himself, and no particular opinion of anyone else. The glitter deepened in his cold eyes.

"Miss Heron does not approve either, it seems. We are desolated, but I think we shall survive it. Come, my dear," he said to his wife, "we are not welcome here. I will take you away."

But Ida did not move. She seemed to realise for the first time what had actually happened, that she had cast in her lot with this man, and made him the master of her destiny.

Again Beatrice's voice, low and very clear and incisive, clove the silence.

"Not just yet, Mr. Weile. I must have some talk with my sister. I am the only guardian she has, and this—this extraordinary step ought not to have been taken without my knowledge and sanction."

Before Weile could answer, Lotta's shrill voice rose in jeering protest.

"Hear her speak! You a guardian! A pretty guardian, chucking the whole show and pushing your own fortune with that rich, silly old woman, who hasn't the gumption to see through you. You're a pretty pair, you are, out to fleece and rob and get the better of everybody; that's where the Heron standard has brought us to-day."

Beatrice took hold of Ida's arm.

"Come upstairs, dear, for a few minutes. We can't

listen to this; it is impossible. Let us leave them to fight it out."

Weile stepped forward with a quick gesture of dissent and disapproval. "Pardon, me, it is I who order my wife's coming and going now. It is time to leave this hostile house, dear one. Come, we can send for your few trifles later."

Beatrice turned upon him the full glance of her steady, unfathomable eyes. Something he saw there abashed the man, though he was one not easily abashed.

"Well, ten minutes, my dear Ida; that is all. Remember the taxi is mounting up at the door."

They passed out of the room and the door was shut. Outside in the little hall Ida began to cry helplessly, as a forlorn child might do. Beatrice was very firm with her.

"Come upstairs, right up to my room. We must get away from the very sound of their voices."

They could hear them already, Lotta's shrill and even threatening, Weile's quieter undertones trying to quell the tumult of a woman scorned.

"Isn't she awful, Bee?" said Ida sobbingly.

Beatrice's only answer was a slight shiver.

"You've no idea what I've had to put up with all these months, ever since you left. She's been more or less like it all the time. The only peace was the little while at night when the boarders were here, and she couldn't very well let out her spite."

"You ought to have left and come to me at once, Ida. There was no call for you to stand that sort of thing from Lotta or anybody. It was horrible for you even to be subjected to it. Why didn't you?"

"Well, you see, I didn't want to be a burden, and I have done my bit here, cooking and sorting up things. She'll find out the difference now I'm leaving."

By this time they had reached the eyrie. Beatrice closed the door and surveyed her young sister with the air of a mother who beholds a wayward child enmeshed by some disaster born of youthful folly.

"I must hear how, where, and by whom you have been married, Ida," she began in an even, judicial voice. "I

don't trust that man, and I'll keep you here until I am assured your marriage is legal."

"It's perfectly legal, Bee. Gustav saw to everything."

"And what minister, not Mr. Grier?"

"Oh, no minister at all! The Sheriff."

"Which one?"

"Sheriff Chambers; he lives in Drumsheugh Gardens; you can go and ask him if you don't believe me. Oh, I'm married right enough. Don't you see my ring?"

She held up her left hand shyly, and Beatrice's eyes were obliged to rivet on the broad, thick band, token and symbol of love's crown, but alas too often its grave.

"Sheriff Chambers? Father used to know him. Did he remember him, or connect you with him?"

"He didn't say; he made no comment at all. I thought he looked at me oddly, that was all."

"I don't wonder. For a Heron to marry before the Sheriff, and a German, would make anyone both feel and look odd, I think."

Ida bridled a little with indignation.

"Oh come, Bee, do try and be just to Gustav. He's a dear really, when you know him better."

"I don't wish to know him better, thank you. I'll never forgive him for what he has done."

"Now that's cruel, and not even just."

Suddenly Beatrice put a searching question:

"Ida, is it possible that you really care for him as father cared for our own mother in the days before the blight got him?"

"Yes, of course I care for him. Nobody could help it who knows him properly. He's so kind, and he has given me such a lot of lovely things. I've never been able to show them or to wear any of them for fear of Lotta."

"Poor lamb, have you sold yourself, then, for the flesh-pots of Egypt?"

Ida pondered this a moment in silence, and then spoke out with a kind of decisive frankness which carried conviction with it.

"It's all very well for you, Bee, to sit in judgment.

You've carved out a path for yourself, got a decent home with very little trouble——"

"It was open to you, dear. Did I not beg you almost on my bended knees to come and share it?"

"You certainly asked me, but I'd just have been a kind of glorified Lizzie Henderson, same as I was here. I have no gifts. I'm not clever. The only thing I know about is how to put on my clothes and make a house nice, and cook up to a point. Who wants poor little trumpery things like that in this horrid, sordid, money-making world? Nobody would pay me a living wage for them. A man like Gustav, who thinks women ought to be home makers, is the only kind of person who has any use for a girl like me, so when he offered me himself and all he possessed do you wonder that I thought it over seriously and ended in accepting? I was so tired of being poor."

"And what is going to happen to you now, Ida?"

"Why, we're going home to our own house to live, of course; to *his* house. It's a lovely one standing in a big garden out Seafeld way, with a lovely view of the sea from the front windows. He's had it all done up for me. We've spent hours together in it since we've been engaged. You'll come and see us in it, won't you, after you've got over all this fuss?"

Beatrice did not commit herself.

"He's so old, Ida. I'm sure he must be fifty."

"Not at all, only forty-one, and we'll probably have that nice boy Conrad to live with us."

"So Lotta will be robbed of her two best-paying guests. She has some cause for grievance."

"Oh, she'll get others. She's always turning somebody away," said Ida flippantly. "Well, I wonder what I need take away from here?"

She glanced round with a shade of contempt, and not a suggestion of regret.

"Are you going home to your own house to-night, then?" asked Beatrice.

Ida shook her head.

"No, no; of course not; we're sailing to-night at nine-thirty for Hamburg, and we'll be away for three

weeks. Gustav wants to introduce me to his people. He has lots of people. His father and mother have retired to an old castle in one of the Rhenish provinces, and he has two brothers married in Hamburg where the shipping business is. Conrad is the son of one of these brothers, and his only sister Elsa is married to an attaché at Berlin, so you see I've married into quite a respectable family, if it *is* German."

Beatrice heard all these details, and while they reassured her on one point, the legality of the marriage and the sincerity of Gustav Weile, the gloom of her face hardly lightened.

The habit of introspection and analysis, natural to her and fed by solitude and much quiet thought, had developed into an almost uncanny prescience regarding both persons and affairs.

Not only did she dislike and distrust Gustav Weile, but she discerned in him to her own disquiet and now active apprehension, something sinister, even cruel. Jimmy Grier's summing-up of the few Germans he had met recurred to her at the moment with horrid persistence.

"Poor Jimmy Grier with his ambitions and his empty pockets. What chance had he?" she said.

Involuntarily Ida winced at the words.

"There's no use hurling Jimmy Grier at my head, a nice enough boy, but he'll be greyheaded before he has anything to offer any woman. I'm sure the sight of the Rev. Donald's wife acting charwoman, nurse and washerwoman, is an object lesson which couldn't be improved on. I liked Jimmy well enough, and I'm not saying that if he and Gastav had been equal in possessions I mightn't have given Jimmy the casting vote."

Beatrice put up her hand deprecatingly, her soul and heart revolting from the flippancy of her sister's tone. That it was a cloak for inward excitement scarcely took the edge off words which sounded unwomanly and heartless.

"I think Jimmy, on the whole, is to be congratulated on his escape," she said, rather shortly.

At that moment a man's voice calling out rather peremptorily caused them both to start. They looked

at one another ; then, by common consent, clung together ; Ida sobbing audibly, her sister's eyes wet with the bitter moisture which is wrung from an aching heart.

" Oh, Bee, you'll forgive me, won't you, and not desert me ? Promise me you'll come and see me at Seafeld when we get back home, and that you'll try to like Gustav for my sake ! "

" Yes, yes ! " said Beatrice, stroking her hair. " I'll try to do all that. God keep you, my little sister, and protect you."

" Gustav will protect me," said Ida, with a quivering smile. " You've no idea how big, and strong, and kind, he is. You'd like him if you'd only try to, if you'd give him a chance."

The voice called again, and they had no choice but to obey the summons. They went downstairs together, Ida dabbing her eyes and applying a powder puff to her hot cheeks.

Weile stood impatiently in the middle of the little hall, his expression indicating that he had had as much of the dining-room and its occupant as he could stand. His eyes were gloomy and even hostile as they watched the sisters coming down the stairs.

Beatrice met his look squarely and walking straight up to him, spoke in a low voice vibrant with feeling :

" It is a very serious step you and my sister have taken. She is very young. You have it in your power to make or mar her life. May I beg you to remember that, and—and be kind to her."

Few men can resist a woman's appeal, and perhaps the fact that Beatrice Heron appealed with difficulty, even in supreme moments, added weight.

The German is quickly emotional, though the fruit of his emotion may be evanescent. He gripped the hands of his new sister-in-law and in guttural tones promised many things. Beatrice released herself quickly, but tried to smile and murmur her thanks. The door was opened ; she walked out down the little flagged path to the gate and stood by while they took their seats in the waiting motor. Ida was crying again, but looked happier. Her last word, her last kiss, her look of love were all for

Beatrice. The woman in the house was entirely forgotten. The door was shut, the engine snorted, and the car leaped forward, carrying Ida Heron away from all she had known to wilds and continents of new experience of a poignancy none of them then dreamed or imagined.

A small hand waved through the open window of the car as it took the curve at the corner and disappeared, the hum of the engine beating fainter and fainter in the sultry air.

Beatrice longed to walk away, the idea of meeting her stepmother again and probably continuing the argument revolted her. But expediency, courtesy, necessity perhaps sent her indoors. Lotta was in the dining-room sitting at the table with her hands tightly clasped, her bosom heaving, the red of excitement high in her cheeks.

"They've gone," said Beatrice, dropping into a chair with a sudden sense of physical weakness. "Away to Germany and God knows what after! Oh, Lotta, I can't help feeling somehow that this is a terrible thing!"

Lotta gloomed, but the fire in her eyes seemed to die down. She had heard one or two plain truths from Gustav Weile spoken with that candid brutality which the Teuton can always muster from underneath the surface of his thin veneer.

"You needn't glare at me over it," she said shortly. "Nothing to do with me! Of course I've seen it coming. Threw herself at his head she did, if ever a girl did. The poor devil couldn't help himself."

Once more Beatrice shrank within herself.

"Don't let's talk any more about it, Lotta. I ought to have insisted on taking her with me to George Street when I left your house. I am sorry for all this upset to you, very sorry, but please don't let us quarrel any more about it. It is hateful and horrible and unbearable, to be at one another's throats like this. It makes life hideous, and God knows it is bad enough without that."

She spoke with passion born of a momentary and overwhelming distaste and disgust of life. What was it likely to be for her but a sordid struggle, unilluminated by any warm human experience. She stood alone in

the world, and was aware that human beings are not intended for such supreme isolation, that the great and wise Creator ordained that they should be set together in families.

"Oh Lotta, I wish Wally was here!" she cried suddenly. "I think I must write and beg him to come home."

"What for, may I inquire?" asked Lotta, in her incisive business-like way. "That would be a fool job if ever there was one. He's getting on jolly well out there, and I had a letter from my cousin Mary Hislop just a fortnight ago. From what she says apparently he's very thick with their girl Betty. It's not likely he'll ever come back, and why should he? His lungs won't let him live in this beastly climate, and he's got a good job and prospects among people who have been very good to him. If I've been a bad stepmother to you and Ida, at least I did give Wally a leg-up when I put him on to my New Zealand relations."

"Yes, yes, I'm grateful! And I have never said you were a bad stepmother, Lotta, only we don't understand one another."

"I don't understand you, you mean. There's nothing underhand about me; I'm open and above-board, thank the Lord! I may belong to common folk, but at least you know where you are with them. I tell you what, Bee, ever since I've been in this house, you Herons and your getting on high horses, for God knows what, have made me tired."

This was Lotta in her more normal moments. Beatrice was aware of a sudden sense of relief and an overwhelming desire to laugh.

"Well we've ridden for a fall evidently," she said ruefully. "This is easily the worst thing that has happened. Do you honestly like Gustav Weile, Lotta? Do you think he could make any woman happy?"

"Oh yes, if he lays himself out for it," she said dryly. "Has the needful too, and while the fancy lasts he'll shell out. But it won't last, that's the trouble. He has had lots of women through his hands, and I don't really see how a chit like Ida is going to keep him."

Beatrice shivered slightly and rose to her feet feeling that she must get out into purer air.

"She may just keep him by the appeal of her youth," she said simply. "Poor child, we can't do much for her now except stand by. She's away to Hamburg to-night to be introduced to his relations. She will have a great deal to tell us when she comes home."

Again hostility sprang into Lotta's eyes. She was jealous with a jealousy which threatened once more to overwhelm her. How often she had pictured such a journey for herself, a triumphant entry into her husband's country, a complete conquest of his crowd of relatives of whom he talked so much! Lotta was confident that but for Ida's intervention she would have won Gustav Weile, and made a tremendous success of her marriage.

"Are you going already? Why can't you stop and have tea with me, and let's thrash it out."

"All the talking in the world won't mend it," said Beatrice. "And I don't feel like tea just now. I'm going down to the Manse. If they don't keep me too long I'll come back later, but if I don't, why not come up to lunch and spend the day with me to-morrow? It would be a change."

"You forget I've got Tom Meikle and Weile's nephew here yet."

"But surely Lizzie could give them lunch for once?"

"I'll think about it," said Lotta, mollified by this little attention and by the invitation which had never been extended to her before. Her feelings not being at all involved where the German was concerned she would get over the disappointment quickly. She had a volatile nature incapable either of deep feeling or constancy in attachment.

Beatrice knew her through and through, and had no anxiety regarding her. Probably in a few days or weeks at most, she would find another boarder who would become the lodestar of her existence, as Weile had been. They parted more amicably than at one moment in that fateful afternoon had seemed at all likely.

These things happened in the summer of 1913.

CHAPTER XXIV

It had been a day of sultry heat. Towards afternoon the sky became suffused with a strange coppery hue through which the sun's rays struggled dimly. The air in the city was breathless, and seawards a haze obscured the cheerful gleam of the Firth of Forth. The window of the little white-and-gold room where Beatrice Heron lived above her business was thrown as high as it would lift, but the air which entered had no freshness in it, but rather a sense of deep oppression which weighted both mind and body. She had just come up from business, where she had lingered for an hour over her accounts, after the assistants were dismissed for the half-holiday.

She knew that she had had a most successful year, but some study of her books preparatory to stock-taking had surprised her. It was without doubt one of the best years the books of the business could show. Madame Theodore was still in America, which she had found so much to her liking that though frequently fixing dates for return she had as frequently altered them. The winter she had spent in California, and now spoke of returning to Scotland in the early autumn. She wrote cheerfully, interesting letters at considerable intervals, frankly confessing that the *wanderlust* had taken possession of her. She asked very few questions about business, only always expressing the hope that it was going well. As she read the first letter she had had for two months, Beatrice became aware that the little dressmaker was wholly detached from her old life and had now the most shadowy interest in it. She had found two letters on the mat when she let herself into the little flat and, being more deeply interested in Madame Theodore's, had opened it first. Now, glancing at the other one, she recognised Jimmy Grier's handwriting, which she had

seen only once since he went voyaging as a ship's surgeon with the Elder Dempster Company.

He had been voyaging continuously since the autumn after he took his degree with high honours at Glasgow University. Beatrice knew that his brother and Alison were worrying about him, lest he should be wasting his time and acquiring the sea-going habit which was only fit for lesser men.

She was deeply interested in the receipt of a letter from Jimmy, and leaning back in her chair, prepared to enjoy it. It began and continued thus :

"DEAR MISS HERON,—I can't tell you how often I've been going to answer your last kind letter, which followed me to Porto Rico by some tortuous route I've never been able to unravel. Anyhow, it was a treat to hear all your news, and to know that Old Scotland stands where it did.

"She seems far enough away from me now, in all conscience, but I haven't forgotten either smoky 'Auld Reekie,' or rainy and kindly Glasgow. I tell you what, Miss Heron, a chap has to get away from his country before he knows exactly what she means to him. I've learned that, meeting crazy Scots all over the world, and finding that love of country is the chief passion, far surpassing the love of women. I've felt its domination myself more especially under provocation, when anybody says anything to belittle the grandest little country on earth. Thank you for all your kind enquiries. I'm very fit, never was fitter, and enjoying my life. It has its limitations, but also its uses. It was odd you should get on the same tack as Donald and Ailie about my future, but I assure you I have no intention of permanently 'going down to the sea in ships.' I think I've had about enough of it, and now I've waxed fat, I'm beginning to kick against it. Most likely you'll see me back in Edinburgh by September, to address myself in earnest to what our august teachers used to call 'the gentleman business of your profession.'

"I've had a rather varied experience since I wrote last, and I've kept a kind of rough diary, thinking it might

be interesting for the kids at Trinity, and help to fix some geographical facts in minds none too well adapted for them. Geography was never the Griers' strong point. I take it it was meant they should go abroad on the face of the earth, and, by dint of hard wandering up and down in it, learn more about it than is to be learned in books. Now, I've got something rather interesting to tell you. We lay up a week in Singapore for some repairs, and a man put me up at the Club, and one night at a small dinner he gave for the captain and me, who do you think should be there but John Brodie? I'd never met him, nor could I remember ever having heard that he was in Singapore, but of course the name had an interest for me, and I asked the man I was sitting next where he came from.

"His answer convinced me he was Brodie of Linnorie. In the smoking-room I managed to get some talk with him, and when I told him who I was, and that I had the privilege of knowing you and your family, you bet he sat up and took notice. He didn't ask many questions, tho only one that seemed to interest him was what you were doing, and whether you were still carrying on at George Street. From the way he put the question, I gathered that he had either seen you there, or got some first-hand knowledge about your affairs. Meeting him, it seemed difficult to associate him with the man who caused all the trouble, and whom the newspapers, at least, put in the category of rogues and scoundrels, preying on innocent, trusting folk. This Brodie is immensely respected in Singapore, in fact he's openly spoken of as ~~the~~ coming man. They say he has administrative gifts of the highest order, and that people consult him about everything. I can readily believe the latter, because he's a man anybody would trust, a splendid chap. He was kind to me, took me to his place in the country where he lives a queer, spartan life, spending nothing, saving every copper. They have it out there that he's working out some great reparation scheme for clearing the name he bears. So, when you're thinking hard about old Compton Brodie, or hear anybody blaming the Brodies generally, leave this one out. He's a white man. I don't know when I met

anybody I liked better. I wish he looked a little happier, but there, you can't have it all ways.

"Well, you'll be tired of this long rigmarole, but you needn't answer it, because we're to be moving with some rapidity in the next month or two, and, as I say, I expect to see Scotland before I'm much older. I hope I'll find you where I saw you last, and that everything will be as it was at the Manse. A chap may rove and wander far, but he wants to find everything unchanged at home.

"Kind regards and best wishes always, from

"JIMMY GRIER."

Beatrice sat very still, looking at the written words, and something tugged at her heart-strings. Fifteen months had gone since she had sent John Brodie out from that very room, with words she had often regretted and longed to recall. This seemed to her like some strange message across the void. It was a call to her blood, anyway, it mounted richly to her cheeks, as she turned the page and read again: *"The only thing that seemed to interest him was what you were doing, and whether you were still carrying on at George Street."* If his interest was strong enough to make him question a stranger, why then had he not acknowledged the little letter she had written, almost with her heart's blood, and winged to him in the night? Often her cheeks had burned over that, longing to recall the written words almost as passionately as she regretted the spoken ones.

But apparently he bore no malice, since he remembered her kindly.

Should she write to him again, she wondered, now that a fresh link was established. Evidently he was so well known in Singapore that a letter simply addressed to him there, or at the English Club, would find him,

Re-reading Jimmy's letter, her thoughts wandered a little. He did not mention Ida, who had now been Mrs. Gustav Weile for nearly a year.

There was no indication that he was still smarting under her treatment of him. Jimmy, however, was a very typical Scot, who did not wear his heart on his

sleeve. This trend of thought served to focus her mind on Ida, and she suddenly remembered that she was due at the house at Seafield for tea. She did not go very often, for though, apparently, Ida was happy enough, Beatrice could not grow accustomed to her brother-in-law, nor find a common meeting ground of respect or liking. All she desired from him was that he should be kind to Ida, and leave her out of the cycle of his thoughts or actions. His frequent and pressing invitations to her to make Seafield House her home, his splendid gifts which she accepted coldly, and did not use, left her untouched.

There was an inner antagonism, something deeper than she could understand or grasp. She did not trust him, she was not sure even whether she had any respect for him, though he was well known in the port of Leith, and business men spoke highly of him.

She folded up her letters, which had brought a new and poignant interest into her day, put them aside in a pigeon hole of the little Empire bureau, and went to change into a thin afternoon dress.

She still wore half-mourning, and the little foulard frock of black and white, with a drooping hat of black lace, were singularly becoming. She was a gracious, dignified, attractive woman, at whom many men and all women looked twice.

The tram car taken at the end of Princes Street bore her down quite comfortably to her destination. Hot in Edinburgh, it was still hotter on the low grounds spreading backwards from the shore. Seafield House was an old family residence, standing inside high walls close to the beach, to which there was access through a door in the wall. The front entrance was in a little side street, through big iron gates which were enclosed with sheet iron, painted a dull green. It ensured a privacy which was very complete, and once within the delectable old garden; one forgot the feeling of gates and bars. It was a sweet old family house, a place where happy people had lived, and splendid families had been reared. It had been empty, however, for some years before the German purchased it, spending a good deal on alterations. New furniture had been purchased for

the new wife, and Ida had every material thing for which the heart of woman is supposed to crave.

Beatrice walked across in a slanting direction from the car terminus to the green gates, and opened the little one at the side, which was not kept locked.

A beautiful lawn, smooth as velvet, though rather dried up now with the sultry heat of one of the driest and warmest summers ever known in these latitudes, lay in front of the house. It had a weeping ash at one corner, and in a hammock swung from its higher branches, Beatrice caught a glimpse of a white skirt, and a very dainty brown shoe, which told her where to find her sister.

She approached softly, surprised that Ida made no movement, and presently she got near enough to discover that she was asleep. She was disquieted to see tears, not yet dried, on her cheek, and to observe that the outline of her somewhat childish face was rather sharpened. A chair stood invitingly near, so Beatrice dropped into it, and sat still for about ten minutes, soothed by the peace of the place, the silence, the complete isolation from all outside things.

Roses were blooming everywhere, for the high wall protected growing things from every wind that blew, the heavy air was scented with their fragrance, but they were wilting a little, almost gasping for the healing, friendly shower. Presently Ida stirred in her sleep, opened her eyes, and, at sight of her sister, raised herself on one elbow, prepared to swing out of the hammock. Beatrice rose, bent over her with a kiss, and begged her to lie still.

"How long have you been sitting there? I was dreaming about you. If it hadn't been so hot, I'd have come up to George Street this afternoon. Oh, goodness, isn't it hot?"

She suddenly became aware of the teardrops on her own cheeks, and hastily dried them with a wisp of a lawn tucked in her belt.

"It is, indeed, a good thunderstorm would clear the air. I've been here about ten minutes only, finding it very restful. I even felt like dozing off myself."

Ida drew herself up, her knees almost to her chin, and folded her arms on them.

"How's Mr. Weile?" asked Beatrice. Never, by any chance, did she address or speak of him by his Christian name. Asked why not, she had just answered simply, "I can't."

"Oh, he's gone to Germany. He's been away three days. He has to go every week just now. 'Never was there such a rush of business between Hamburg and Leith,' he says. And also, I believe, they're re-arranging the firm out there. His brother Frederick and two of the nephews are going out of it."

"And how's Conrad?"

"Gone to Hamburg, too. I rather think, from what Gustav said, that he isn't coming back, probably going to take the place of one of the other boys in the business."

"Oh!" said Beatrice. "A regular shuffle of cards, evidently."

"Isn't it? Queer boy, Conrad, Bee. He was crying outright when he said good-bye to me, and when I told Gustav, he was angry, and growled like anything. I suppose it is business worries, but he's been very queer and snappy now for months. He went off this time without even saying good-bye to me."

Ida was the ingenuous child still, with no idea of covering up any of the little crosses in her married life. Beatrice, however, had never encouraged her to speak in this vein. Temperamentally, she was entirely different, and pride, if nothing else, would have put a seal on her lips, provided she had made a mistake, or found herself in any difficult situation. She could fight a battle with far more courage and strength alone, than in an atmosphere of sympathy from others. Suddenly, and to her own surprise, however, she found herself saying:

"But you're happy enough, aren't you, Ida?"

Ida pondered a moment.

"Oh yes, I'm happy up to a point. Gustav is really very kind to me, and most frightfully generous with money. But I'm outside his life."

"Only his business life?" corrected Beatrice gently.

"Oh, well, it's the same thing, and somehow I thought

the Germans told their wives everything. I'm sure I've read about their comradeship."

"No, no, dear. It is the French you are thinking of, the French *bourgeoisie*. We never hear that about Germans. You know what their Kaiser thinks of women, and to what regions he relegates them."

"The Kaiser!" Ida gave a queer little mirthless laugh. "He must either be a wonderful Emperor, or a very great man. They positively worship him. It's slavish, a sort of awestricken, breathless wonder, which leaves me cold. We don't speak about him ever now, because I once said something rather flippant, the sort of thing we often say about our own royalties though we like them quite well, and Gustav was in the most awful towering rage you could imagine, so now we leave their precious Kaiser out of the count."

Beatrice smiled faintly, and Ida rambled on.

"It's a dull life here, really, Bee, for Gustav doesn't like me to have too many friends coming about. Lotta comes occasionally. She's quite got over her unholy rage against us, and she loves being asked to dinner. Gustav doesn't mind, he just laughs at her. The Griers are the people he can't stand. I had to tell them just straight out not to come when he might be at home. Did Alison tell you?"

Beatrice nodded.

"I had a letter from Jimmy to-day," she said on the spur of the moment. She was surprised to observe the quick flush rising to her sister's cheek.

"Did you really? Do tell me about it? Can I see it?"

"I didn't bring it. He's still sailing in an Elder Dempster boat, but I think he's veering homewards now, having had enough of the sea and the restless, roving life which, while it takes him to many places, really leads nowhere."

"What a clever description of a ship's doctor. Does he write in good spirits?"

"Very, it was a most interesting letter."

"You might have brought it to let me see," said Ida in a grudging voice, then, after a moment, added: "Did he say anything about me?"

Beatrice shook her head.

"Nothing. He was principally taken up telling me he had met John Brodie at a dinner at Singapore, and been up spending the day at his place."

"Oh!" said Ida, not interested much, because she had never seen John Brodie, nor had the faintest idea how deeply he had stirred the current of her sister's life.

"So he's on his way home? Did he say what he intends to do next?"

"No, but it is obvious. He'll settle down somewhere and begin the practice of his profession."

"As an assistant, I suppose, for even if he has saved every penny since he began to earn, he couldn't buy a practice. It's a pity money is so unevenly distributed."

Beatrice thought so, too, and a momentary silence fell. Suddenly Ida sent the current of thought in an entirely new direction. "How they hate us, Bee! Sometimes it turns me queer and sick all over."

"Whom are you talking about?"

"Oh, the Germans. They swarm here, and just lately they seem to have all sorts of important matters to talk about. I'm quite used to being sent out of the room. Sometimes——"

"Sometimes what?" asked Beatrice, arrested by something indefinable in her sister's voice and eyes.

"Sometimes I think it won't be long before the fighting begins. I'm nearly certain that that what they're always talking about is nearer than any of us think."

"Do they talk about it?" asked Beatrice quickly.

"Mr. Weile and his German friends."

"Only in a roundabout way. I'm getting to understand them, even when they talk their own language all at once in a perfect babel. There is something big imminent, anyway, and I must say I'm uneasy about all this rushing to and fro, between Leith and Hamburg for Gustav, I mean. I've got the notion it isn't private, but national business, and I'm sure, too, that Conrad's leaving Leith had something to do with it."

Beatrice reflected a moment.

"All sorts of queer things are happening everywhere just now, Ida, especially in the Near East. The news

is not good this morning. Well, I suppose if it's got to come, the sooner the better!"

Something smote and held her, she could not tell what, but it brought her to her feet, and made her turn her eyes restlessly, with a strange apprehension towards the sea.

"It would be horrid for you, Ida, if there ever should be a real war between us and Germany. You'd have to take sides."

"One side. I should have to stand by Gustav, or he'd kill me, besides——"

"Besides what?"

Ida began to cry again, and Beatrice moved to her and put her arm protectingly about her shoulders.

"Oh, Bee, when my little baby comes, he'll be German, Gustav says. He'll have to be brought up a German, hating our country."

"Not necessarily. You'll be his mother, darling," said Beatrice, far more moved than she dared own. She had only suspected what was coming, the something indefinable and wistful in her sister's face when she caught her asleep had confirmed it. And she had always hoped, though why she had never acknowledged, that Ida would have no child to Gustav Weile.

They clung together a moment in one of these supreme poignant interludes which punctuate even the most reserved and inarticulate existence. And both were conscious of some portent, something sinister and awful brooding over the whole world.

CHAPTER XXV

THE war was three months old.

No such months have ever been registered in the history of the world or of human hearts. The race was weighed in the balance, and not found wanting, but it was youth who paid the price.

In consequence, the world is old and tired to-day, and in darker mood finds it difficult to recall the gleam and glory of the enthusiasm with which youth went to war for freedom, and all the things for which men will fight and die, even those who find it difficult to live for them.

We have forgotten the wild rhythm resounding in our streets and country alleys, as the feet of armed and arming men turned towards the throbbing heart of the Empire. From every green hill and fertile valley, from smoky town and smiling village hamlet, across the seven seas they came, eager to lay all they were and had at the feet of the mother who had borne them.

It was that high enthusiasm, that irresistible call of the blood which, triumphing over every weakness and obstacle, brought Wally Heron home from New Zealand to Scotland in November. He arrived with no contingent, but alone, travelling steerage because he would not ask his first-class fare from the relatives who, having proved his worth, grudged his going. They were a queer, hybrid crew, though kind withal, but they had a tinge of Lotta's self-seeking, her utter indifference to the feelings or the fate of others. Their kindness to Wally Heron was not wholly disinterested, for he had arrived at a moment when the labour problem was acute on their station, and his help was most welcome. They could not understand, though Scotch themselves, the passion which laid hold of the boy the moment the news reached

them ; they had even jeered a little at it after the manner of those who do not comprehend. But inside of a week he had reached the coast and, in some way he was never able to account for, managed to secure a berth in a steamer ready to sail. He was not without news of his home people. He was aware that Ida had married Weile the German, and though the news had merely filled him with a vague wonder at first, now it was something to gnash his teeth over.

With only his stepmother at "The Outlook," he had no desire to go there with homing feet ; he could not imagine Beatrice living above a dressmaker's shop in George Street, nevertheless he turned thither with gladness and a strange mingling of homesickness which inclined him to cry like some little school-sick boy. As a matter of fact he did cry, turning decently into the gardens of Princes Street to hide it. The air was soft and warm and muggy, with a low mist brooding over the city of his love. But there was plenty of noise. The news from the fighting fronts was bad, and the newsboys took their fill of shouting their disastrous wares.

After a night in a crowded train, without food or sleep, Wally was not fit. But he was home ; he was ready to join the great company, to give his youth and his life if need be for the land of his birth. About nine, after a wash and brush up at a public place, he headed across the now busy streets upon which brooded a queer hush, and without trouble found his sister's place of abode. He swung up the stairs and presented himself, a lean, brown figure in a shabby, ill-made colonial suit, inside the pink-and-white salon, and asked for Miss Heron. A little midinette with a pert face and an immense bow of black ribbon standing out from her head like railway signals eyed him from top to toe with a mingling of hauteur and curious interest.

"No doon yet," she answered, and the Scotch brought a queer twisted smile to Wally's face. Somehow he had expected her to answer in French, she looked so like pictures he had seen in magazines and comic papers of the little apprentices of Paris hurrying with their gaily-coloured bandboxes through the streets.

"How do I get up to her, outside stair or in here?" he asked.

"Oh, up the stairs, but if ye wait, I'll speak up the tube and say you're wantin' her."

"Don't do that; I'll go up," the strange young man answered, and with that disappeared taking the second stair at a bound.

Lizzie Henderson, whom circumstances had transferred to the only service in the world she had any use for, was polishing the brass furniture on the door when the stranger appeared. She did not know him, because he had left "The Outlook" before her term began. She therefore eyed him askance, not in the least able to place him, or gauge his business there at nine o'clock in the morning.

"Miss Heron?" he asked, and the sound of his voice penetrating the limited interior brought Beatrice to the sitting-room door. She had just glanced at the morning papers and was ready to go down without heart or stomach to her work.

"Hulloa, old girl," said Wally with a queer unsteady smile. Then Beatrice, realising what had happened and filled with a passion of love and pride and thankfulness, ran and caught him in her arms.

Lizzie, slightly scandalised, unable to connect this breathless meeting with her staid mistress, her thoughts not nimble enough to guess the truth, stared for a half-second, muttered, "Eh mighty!" under her breath and took her revenge on the bell pull with the duster.

Beatrice drew him in, and the door was shut.

"Oh Wally, you've come, you've come, to—to join up!"

"Yes, of course, the only thing to do," he answered briefly, his eyes taking in his sister with an air of puzzled pride.

She was the same, yet not the same. The features and the figure and the wonderful eyes belonged to Beatrice, but there was a new graciousness, an indefinable charm, a softness! It was as if, crude before, she had become a finished product of womanhood.

"You look very fit, Bee, but not the same!"

"I'm just the same, but you are splendid, Wally, so

brown and fit, quite different, so strong ! That is what I'm more glad about than anything."

" Anything to eat going ? " he asked with a little glance round the pretty feminine room. " I'm empty inside, as hollow as a drum and stony broke to boot."

Beatrice flew out of the room and summoned Lizzie Henderson from the door furniture with agitated words.

" It's Mr. Wally, Lizzie, all the way from New Zealand. He's hungry ; he needs breakfast ; lots of breakfast, bacon and eggs and everything you can lay your hands on."

Lizzie came in and banged the door.

" Maister Wally ! to jine up ? " she inquired breathlessly.

" Yes, of course."

" Hurrah ! " said that incomprehensible creature with a sort of war whoop in her voice. Afterwards she explained it to her mistress by saying that she " could dee happy now, there was yin of oor ain folk a sodger."

Beatrice went back to the room to find Wally standing in one of the long windows looking down towards the sea.

" I've seen it in my dreams out there in the heat," he said in a queer thick voice. " When the grass was burnt up and the stock suffering for a drop of water I saw the grey clouds creeping down on the Fife shore. By God, but I never knew it was half so beautiful ! It's a country to die for, Bee, that's one good comfort."

" Not to die for, Wally," she cried with a sharp poignant note in her voice. " To fight and live for. Come and sit down and let me look at you and tell me how it all came about."

He sat down on the edge of the gilt settee, and began to talk. " Oh yes, the Bishops are all right, and I'll never forget what I owe to them," he said in answer to her question. " They've give me back my health, but, of course, I've worked for my living out there. They're a bit like Lotta, they don't give away anything for nothing."

" But you liked the life ? "

" Oh yes, up to a point, but if this hadn't come I'd have had to break away. You see, there was no prospect.

There are the two boys growing up and the ranch will be divided between them."

Beatrice pondered half a moment, then put another question with the queer feeling that she wanted to get the whole ground cleared and learn exactly how her brother stood, both in relation to them and to the people he had left.

"But Lotta said—at least she gave me to understand some while ago, that you might marry her niece, Betty?"

Wally's face flushed all over and he put up his hand to hide it.

"I hate to speak about it, Bee, it sounds so jolly rotten and conceited. She would have married me, I think, but I didn't feel that way. Quite a nice little girl, the best of the bunch in fact, but she wasn't my sort, that's the beginning and the end. For that alone I'd have had to quit."

"Would they have agreed to it, the father and mother, supposing you'd felt differently?"

"I dare say they might, but don't let's talk about it, and don't look at me with that queer look in your eyes. I've played the game, Bee. I haven't anything to wipe off the slate, and as I said I've worked for my living among the Bishops, and earned my grub. Now tell me about Ida and that German beast. Of course he's a beast, they all are."

"He's been very kind to Ida, Wally, but he's cut her off," said Beatrice with a strange wrung note in her voice.

"Cut her off from what do you mean?"

"From us; she isn't here at all. He took her to Germany on the fifteenth of July, ostensibly to pay a visit to his people. She's in Rhenish Prussia somewhere. Of course she never came back. He knew what was coming and took her away. She's expecting a baby next month. Poor lamb, he'll be born in his father's country."

"A Hun and to fight for the Huns!" cried Wally, his face betraying unutterable gloom. At the moment the smiling and agitated Lizzie appeared and asked whether she might lay the cloth. A nod from Beatrice assured her, and the work was proceeded with deftly. Then she

disappeared and presently the little house was pervaded with the appetising odour of bacon sizzling in the pan.

"Oh Lord, Bee, tell her to hurry up! I'm starving," said Wally. "And it's topping to be home. I've been away five years. Does it seem credible?"

"It seems much longer than that, Wally, so much has happened."

"So the poor kid is a prisoner in Germany; tell me more about Weile. Ida said in the only letter I had from her after her marriage that he was a naturalised Britisher now."

"The most of them are for commercial purposes, Wally, but that is a matter of no importance. It alters nothing. They're bound hand and foot to Germany."

"Well, of course, it's their country, same as ours belongs to us, and nobody blames them for fighting for her, but it's the way they fight. My God, it won't bear speaking about or thinking about. I don't suppose we'll ever see Ida again, because we're going to lick them; wipe the floor of the earth with them."

"Oh Wally, I like to hear that!" cried Beatrice pitifully. "But do you think we can?"

Wally's eyes grew round with wonder.

"I don't think it, I know it," he answered, not exultantly, but with a quiet earnestness which carried conviction. "There isn't anything else to be done. Good heavens, do you think we are going to let these swine inherit the earth and trample on everything that is decent and worth having?"

"No, no; but we're not getting on, Wally. Have you seen the papers this morning?"

"I haven't, I've stopped reading them. What's the good? Slog away at it, keeping the end in view, that's what we've got to do. Hulloo, here's Phyllis with the nectar of the gods. I've fallen on my feet and no mistake!"

It was only the gay, inconsequent Wally, smiling through all. He had made a gallant fight with inherited weakness and the rigours of the Scottish climate, but had never lost heart. And now, so true a son of Scotland was he, that restored, almost remade, he had hastened back

to give himself to the land of his fathers and her righteous cause.

Beatrice ministered to his wants, and watched him with a mingling of pride and satisfaction which astounded her.

Once more a Heron, fully worthy of his name and heritage, would fight in his country's wars, and the old name and race would not be shamed by Wally's contribution to the traditions of Linnorie.

"Tell me about the old place," he said with his mouth full. "Ever see it now?"

Beatrice shook her head and the faint colour rose in her cheeks as if some urgency in her blood betrayed her.

"I haven't for ages and ages."

"But they're still there, aren't they, those blighters, who made such a mess of things?"

"I don't think they can be. They let it I know, and went down south to Torquay or Bournemouth, or somewhere. I don't go out to Marriston at all, Wally, now. It hurts too much."

"Tell me all about it. Oh yes, I know you wrote, but it's different hearing you tell it. When letters come they simply aggravate a chap because they seem to leave out every blessed thing he wants to know."

"A poor tribute to the home correspondent," said Beatrice with a slight rueful laugh. "But really there isn't anything to tell about Linnorie. You'll have to go out yourself if you want first-hand up-to-date information."

"Good idea! Probably I will after I've got settled with my regiment."

"Which one?"

"The one and only, the Royal Scots. I'll go to the depot to-morrow after I've had a night's rest and have recovered from London and the train journey. But about the Brodies, two sons weren't there, what are they doing in the war?"

Once more the urgent blood mounted to Beatrice's face. "The younger one is just a schoolboy. He can't be more than seventeen now."

"And the other?"

"He is not in this country. Don't you remember he went to the Straits Settlements years ago?"

"I hadn't heard," said Wally, with his eyes on his plate and giving no sign at all that he had observed his sister's rising colour. "But if he's any kind of a chap he'll come home. They're simply tumbling over one another in New Zealand. War-mad, in fact, and the women thinking up every pretext for getting over here. Lord, what a world!"

Enjoying the good food and above all the sense of homeliness and comfort in his sister's house, Wally's thin, eager face seemed to round and catch some hint of his lost youth.

"Rum go this, Bee, you know. Do you really like the dressmaking job?"

"Yes, I like it quite well, and I'm making money, Wally. If the war hadn't intervened I'd have cleared fifteen hundred this year. I did it last year. I don't spend much on myself."

"Shows what women spend on their clothes! But I must say you've altered."

"In what way, dear; not for the worse, I hope?"

"Oh, no; the other way round. You're simply stunning, you know, and you look about as much like a dress-maker as I look like a noble lord."

Beatrice laughed again.

"Fashionable dressmakers have to be very imposing persons, Wally."

"They must be if they look like you. Duchess isn't in it; in fact, the only duchess I ever remember having seen was short and stubby, not unlike a glorified wash-lady. So it's paying well? I'm glad, but it's queer all the same, dashed queer! It didn't ought to be, you know. After all, we're Herons, and though I've been at the back of beyond where family doesn't count much, I'm proud of the old name yet."

"So am I, Wally; that's why I'm here."

Seeing the puzzled look in his eyes, she went on quickly: "I'm saving up to clear off some part of the debt to the creditors of the firm, you know—the poor widows

and orphans and needy elderly men who lost their money in the smash."

Wally's lips twisted queerly, and Beatrice saw his shoulders give a quick heave.

"I'll be able to help when we get through with the fighting. I don't know how, but I shall. Meanwhile it's good to see you, old girl, and I for one am not going to down the poor old war that is going to give me my fighting chance."

She saw that he was deeply moved, but their talk was interrupted by a message from the salon below demanding Miss Heron's presence and attendance on an important and exacting customer.

Later in the day, finding that Beatrice was much engaged below, Wally took an early afternoon train out to Marriston. He did not walk through the village, but took a short cut through the woods and was surprised, coming suddenly upon the back of the house, to see the Red Cross flag flying from the battlements.

He guessed what had happened at once. Linnorie had been converted into a military hospital. Well, to what better use could the home which had cradled some of Scotland's finest soldiers be put? He dawdled about the outskirts for a little while, and then decided that he would like to see the inside. So he walked boldly to the front of the house, and as he approached the open door had a glimpse of the long dining-room which had been converted into a ward in which appeared to be many beds.

He walked in and stood irresolute a moment on the black-and-white tiles of the big hall, from which all the fine old rugs had been removed for sanitary reasons. The house was very quiet; it was the hour when patients are supposed to be asleep, and their nurses off duty.

But as he wondered how he could attract attention, he suddenly saw a trim little figure in nurse's garb on the stairs.

She came quickly towards him to discover his business.

Wally thought he had never seen so sweet a face.

"What can we do for you?" she asked kindly. "I suppose you have come to see one of our boys?"

"No, I haven't come to see anybody particularly. It's the place rather," said Wally in some confusion. "My name's Heron, Walter Heron. I've just come back from New Zealand. My people used to live here, but probably you've heard the name?"

Instantly her hand went out and her eyes began to glow.

"I have, indeed! I'm Monica Brodie; come right upstairs and see mother. She's the Commandant of this hospital, and we're quite full. We've thirty patients."

"Have you?—but how stunning for you to do this. My sister——"

Wally, unaware how the winnowing wind of service and sacrifice had already stirred the waste places of selfishness and indifference, looked the supreme surprise he felt. Monica read him like an open book.

"You did not think Linnorie would ever be put to such a use, or perhaps that any Brodie could be capable of service," she said with a momentary whimsical gleam in her clear eyes.

Wally, ingenuous boy still, furiously blushed.

"I have no right to think anything about you at all," he said, blundering still further. "But I can't help being pleased, and my sister——"

"Your sister Beatrice! Tell me how she is. I so often think about her and wish we could meet, only somehow we don't."

"She's very well, thank you. If she'd known I was coming here she would have sent you a kind message, I'm sure."

"A kind message? Yes, I think she would. Well, do come in and let me give you tea. Oh, yes, please do! Mother will be angry if I let you go away without it."

Wally suffered himself to be persuaded, and followed the trim figure into the Commandant's sitting-room, the small morning-room of the house which was now the only spot where the mistress of Linnorie and her daughter could seek or find privacy.

Wally felt strange, yet very much at home. Monica's bright eyes and engaging smile, her frank comradely air, upset all his preconceived ideas and memories of the Brodies, with whom, like Beatrice, he had associated

somehow the evil fortunes of his family. Words of Holy Writ which he had learned at his mother's knee returned to him. "The sins of the fathers shall be visited on the children, to the third and fourth generation."

Should he visit her father's wrongdoing on this sweet creature smiling friendly upon him? Perish the thought!

Monica rang the bell, a little wardmaid came and received her order, and they resumed their talk. Suddenly Monica said pitifully:

"Tell me about your other sister who married—the German Consul, was it?"

"He was once a consul, but not when he married her," said Wally hardly. "She's in Germany, locked up somewhere, where we shan't hear of her, I expect, till the war is over. Beatrice has had one short letter, since she got there—a letter full of nothing. I read it this morning. It was so cleverly written that it was even impossible to read between the lines."

"Oh, poor thing! But perhaps she may be happy! We must hope so."

"Miss Brodie, the thing is clean impossible, for all the reasons there are. To begin with, she ought never to have married him. I'm all for folks marrying in their own country. I'm sure even it is better not to marry the English, and of course, vice versa. Then, as we're going to wipe the Germans off the face of the earth, I don't just see what's to be the end of it for her. It's an awful tragedy, that's what it is!"

Monica sighed, agreeing completely with every word he spoke. Then she got him on to talk about New Zealand, but found him less enthusiastic than might have been expected. Wally rendered thanks to the land of sunshine and caller air for his restoration to health, and nothing more. He would be scrupulously just, but New Zealand, or, rather, the people among whom his lot had been cast, who, after all, are the deciding factors in existence for most, had failed to win his heart.

They were happy together, these two young creatures, for youth calls to youth all the world over. When Wally rose at last, thanking her simply for her kindness, and said he was going over to the little burying-ground in

the corner of the park, by the ruined chapel, where his father and mother slept, her eyes filled up.

"They know, I'm sure, where they are to-day, that you have come back, and that we are all fighting and serving for Scotland," she whispered at the last.

Wally wrung her hand at parting, and after he had gone a few steps across the grass, walked back to the open door, where she still stood, her grey form and white apron silhouetted against a dark background.

"Say, Miss Brodie, would you write to me sometimes, if I write to you when I'm in camp? It might be Gales or Redford, I don't know. I'm finding out to-morrow. I'm just getting my house in order first."

"Yes, of course, I should love to write, and I'll send you things from Linnorie, flowers, as they come on in season—the primroses are the best. Across there in the little wood they are heavenly in April. I wish you'd come back to Linnorie in primrose time."

"Why?" asked Wally, and his eyes clave to her face.

"They seem to belong somehow to us who are young. They are all for hope, and the things that belong to hope. When I see them I know the winter has really gone, and something sings in my heart."

"Something sings in your heart. I'll remember that," said Wally thickly. "And when I'm in France, where I hope to be when the primroses come, I'll look for some from Linnorie. Thank you again."

She watched him, a lonely figure, walking a trifle awkwardly across the park, where the early November shadows were already falling, and all the pitiful heart of youth and love and longing was in her eyes. To Wally something new had come, some vision of what life could be for happier men, the favourites of fortune, who have but to desire and attain. But he would have to fight for every inch of ground, and if ever he had a home, and a woman to love and to love him, they would be hardly, yet gloriously won. Meanwhile, his country's honour and life were in his keeping, and presently, by the side of the old, old graves of his race where the mother he had adored and the father of whom he had none but sweet memories slept together, life's fitful fever over for

ever, he consecrated himself. There he took his vow of service, to give clean, pure tribute to the name he bore, no quarter to the enemy, loyalty to his comrades, and, when the time was ripe and he should be free, perhaps, who knows, his feet might turn again to the home of his fathers, and find Monica on the steps.

But these were the dreams of youth, never to be realised this side of time. For Wally Heron there was a Better Country, where :

“ E'en grown-up men secure
Better manhood by a brave leap
Through the chill mist of Death's thin sleep
Manhood that will endure.”

CHAPTER XXVI

"CAPTAIN GRIER'S here, Miss Beatrice," said Lizzie Henderson, speaking down the tube with a queer thrill in her voice. "Can ye come up?"

Could she come up? Beatrice Heron's feet simply flew up the stair, and with a lack of reserve which somewhat astonished Jimmy Grier, almost threw herself into his arms.

"Oh, Jimmy! And looking so splendid! Is it really you?"

Jimmy was looking both smart and fit. His brand new R.A.M.C. uniform fitted him like a glove. His year of travel in all parts of the world, and six months active service on the fighting fronts had removed the last trace of awkwardness from his looks or bearing. He was very handsome, and Beatrice sighed inwardly for the "might-have-been."

He shook her hand warmly, noting that she looked pale, and that she had aged a good deal.

"When did you get home, and have you seen Donald and Ailie?" she asked breathlessly. "They've felt it terribly, that you've never had leave. And how long do you get now?"

"Five days."

"Five days! And it takes one to come, and one to go! It is awfully good of you to look me up."

"I wanted to. We sat up till three a.m. this morning at the Manse, so I've got most of the news."

"But you'll sit down, won't you? You're the first one I really know that I've had a chance of speaking to—in the war, I mean. Wally writes letters, but of course they're all censored."

"Hasn't he got a commission yet?"

"He's not seeking it, Jimmy. Wally's splendid, I'm so proud of him, I don't know how to bear myself. But oh, I do want to see him! Leave gets scarcer and scarcer. But honestly, Jimmy, how are we getting on? How long do you think it will last yet?"

"Some years."

"Years, you mean months, Jimmy! We simply can't go on like this. I'm afraid to open the papers in the mornings now. I suppose you know Edinburgh has lost thousands."

"So has Glasgow, and London, and everywhere else," he said gloomily. "And it's only the beginning."

"Oh, Jimmy, no, no! Surely not!"

He sat down and looked her very straightly in the face.

"Honestly, Miss Heron, I see no prospect of the end, nor any reason why the war shouldn't go on without end. We're not ready, even yet. I could tell you things, even about the medical service, which would turn your hair grey. But we're getting ready, and when we are, why then, we'll bring it to an end, that's all. But don't let's talk about the war."

"There isn't anything else, Jimmy," she said, and he saw how her hands nervously locked themselves on her lap.

"Oh, yes, there are a few things left. I'm glad to find you here, but I don't honestly think you're looking very well. How's your business getting on?"

"Don't ask me. I loathe it. I hate and despise myself for sticking to it."

"But can't you leave it?"

"Not very well. You see, I'm waiting for Madame Theodore to come back. If she would, I'd go out to France immediately, I'm dying to go. I can't sleep at night for it, nor attend to my business in the day."

"Then there's still business doing?"

Her strong, fine mouth expressed ineffable scorn.

"Oh, yes, more than you'd think. There are women who would call out for new frocks on the judgment day, I believe. If I'd been absolutely on my own, I'd have given up months ago."

"Why doesn't the old lady come back?"

"Well, she's really been trying to get back for about ten months now. She stopped away purposely for over a year, to give me a chance, and now, when she wants to get back, she finds it difficult to get either a passport or a boat. But she thinks she's going to be successful at last. You see, I hadn't any agreement with her. She didn't buy herself out, or anything. It wasn't an ordinary business transaction at all, and I haven't the right either to shut down or give up, because I didn't pay anything for the goodwill, and it's still hers."

"Sounds a bit complicated, I must say," observed Jimmy reflectively.

"It's really quite simple. Didn't I tell you I was trying to save up to pay off some of the debt left at my father's death?"

"I think I remember, either you told me, or Ailie."

"I'm just as keen on it yet, but somehow the war has pushed itself in and pushed out other things. Tell me, Jimmy, what are you doing out there, and where are you?"

"I'm in charge of a casualty clearing station, one of the biggest on the French front."

"I suppose it's pretty awful, isn't it?"

Jimmy nodded and turned his head away.

"Isn't there something I could do up there, couldn't you make a place for me?"

He shook his head.

"It's only trained women that are of use, and not all of them can stand it."

"I could, Jimmy, I'm sure. If only I had a chance to serve instead of pottering about here, talking to senseless and selfish women about their clothes. I'm getting desperate. Unless Madame Theodore comes soon I'm afraid I shan't be able to hold out."

Jimmy said nothing, but looked sympathetic. He wished to ask some questions about Ida, but a natural shyness made it difficult. At last he blurted it out.

"Do you ever hear from your sister now?"

Beatrice shook her head.

"Never. I've had only one letter and a post card since the war began. Isn't it frightful to think about?"

Can you imagine a more appalling position for a Scots-woman to be in ? ”

“ There are a good many, both Scotch and English, in the same boat, I’m afraid. They’re to be pitied, yes, and the line of least resistance, I should imagine, would be the only one open to them. They’ll have to hold their tongues, anyhow.”

“ It is getting on my nerves. I dream about her sometimes, and always she seems to be holding out her hands to me.”

“ Don’t get morbid about it,” said Jimmy in his quiet, strong, sympathetic way. “ Probably it is not so bad as you imagine. Ailie seemed to think he’d be kind to her, anyway.”

“ Oh, Jimmy ! ” cried Beatrice impulsively. “ If only she’d married you.”

Jimmy shook his head.

“ Perhaps it was better as it is. I may not come through, you know.”

“ Be quiet, I won’t let you speak like that ! And anyhow, even if you did, yours would be a glorious death, and not an inglorious life like his. Tell me, Jimmy, you’ve got over it, haven’t you ? I’d like to be sure of that.”

He nodded, and his eyes, meeting hers, were tranquil and assuring.

“ Oh, yes, life, and knocking about the world a bit helps a chap a lot. There are other things in the world than love. It’s the best, though,” he added, with a queer jerk in his voice. “ For the lucky ones who come up with it. Queer, wasn’t it, that I should meet Brodie out in Singapore ? An awfully decent chap. Did you ever meet him here ? ”

“ Yes,” said Beatrice, and her voice fell very low. “ Soon after his father died. Don’t you remember, he told you. It was in the letter you wrote to me.”

“ Oh, so it was ! He was very keen asking questions about you. A splendid chap. I’m always hoping I’ll come across him in France.”

Beatrice gave a great start.

“ Is he there, Jimmy ? ”

"Yes, of course, where else would he be?" he asked, with a faintly ironical note in his pleasant voice. "He's not the stuff that slackers are made of. And anyway, I was told he was with the Yeomanry somewhere. I dare say we may come across one another. All sorts of queer things happen out there, the queerer they are, the surer they are to happen. All life is topsy-turvy."

At that moment, when feeling had grown almost too tense for speech, a light tap came to the door, and Lizzie Anderson opened it.

"Please, Miss Bee, could you see Miss Brodie from Linnorie? She's waiting."

Beatrice sprang up.

"Where, Lizzie? Downstairs, in the show-room?"

"No, ma'am, she's at the door. I wasna' sure as the Captain was here," said Lizzie, regarding him with open pride and admiration, which caused him incontinently to smile. He rose also, and laid hold of his cap and gloves, but Beatrice lifted a detaining hand.

"No, sit down, Jimmy, I want you to see her, and she'd like to see you too, as you met her brother in the East."

Jimmy, having time on his hands which frankly he did not know what to do with, sank meekly back into his chair as Beatrice closed the door. She was only a few minutes gone, he could hear the quick murmur of talk out in the little hall, then the door was opened again, and they came in together. A more dainty, winsome thing than Monica in her nurse's uniform it would be difficult to imagine. Already the sight of her had wrought havoc in the wards at Linnorie Hospital, doing good to some, and harm to others, causing mysterious rises of temperature, and agitated, sometimes moody, silences. Beatrice introduced the two with pride, and Monica smiled bravely up into Jimmy Grier's eyes, thus wiping out for ever the last shadow of another's image.

"Oh, what luck I am in to-day!" said Beatrice. "Now we'll have a tea party, the best I've ever had. Put down your cap and gloves this moment, Jimmy Grier, and don't pretend you're in a hurry, when you

know perfectly well you're not. No, they don't want you at the Manse. If I let you away in time for their five o'clock tea, you'll do perfectly well, and now it's only half-past three."

Then she turned to Monica with an odd tenderness in her eyes which surprised Jimmy enormously.

"Won't you take off your cloak, Miss Brodie?"

"My name is Monica, and when you say it I'll take off my cloak, and stop to tea," said Monica with her demure little smile.

Beatrice smiled delightedly, and snatched at the cloak, then ran out of the room with it to give instructions to Lizzie for the most wonderful tea party in the world. Jimmy and Monica smiled across the table as if they had known one another since the beginning of time.

"Isn't she a darling, and isn't this a dear little house? When I'm most awfully tired, and everything is out of joint, I shut my eyes and think of this little golden eyrie and Beatrice in it."

"Aye, it's a good place," said Jimmy with a note of dry content in his voice. "But I hope things are not out of joint with you to-day. They never ought to be for the likes of you."

"Oh, but they are. I've come to tell her about it. Did you come to tell her things, too? She's so strong and wonderful, don't you think, and she has always something to say which makes things different."

"It's a good summing-up of Miss Heron, but I hadn't thought of her that way," said Jimmy. "She seems a bit unsettled I think now. I suppose it's the war. I've been out of Scotland since a year before it started, and I came to France by way of Marseilles, and have been there since last August without a break."

Monica's eyes grew round with sympathetic wonder.

"That is exactly what happened to my brother John. Odd, isn't it, I suppose you haven't met?"

"Not in France, but we did in Singapore. I dined in his company one night, and he asked me out to his place to spend the day. I thought, maybe, Miss Heron would have told you."

"No, she did not, I wonder why," said Monica musingly.

"I suppose she forgot, or it didn't interest her very much. So this is your first leave?"

"Absolutely the first, but I'm not minding. I didn't want particularly to come. They had to shove me out. I suppose I did need the break. It'll make me fitter for the big job ahead."

"But what about your people? Didn't you want to see them?" asked Monica, who had not the faintest idea who he was or whence he had come.

"I haven't many. Only my brother Donald, the minister of Little Trinity and his wife, and the kids. No, I haven't any father or mother—here." He added the last word after a hesitating stop. Monica marked and inwardly digested it.

"Are they living in another country, then?" she asked.

Jimmy nodded and pointed upward.

"Aye, the best there is," he said simply, and the girl's eyes filled with tears, which made Jimmy desperately uncomfortable, for no reason on earth, but that his own heart was melting within him.

"You're a doctor, aren't you?" she asked then.

"A kind of a doctor. I haven't had much practice in ordinary medicine. I sailed on a ship after I took my degree. I wanted to get clean away from everything I'd ever known."

"You've felt like that, too, then?"

"Aye, often and often. The sea did its job, but it's no life for a man who cares about his profession. Now if I come through this big thing, I'll be a surgeon, I expect. It'll be the only thing I'll know, and the chances are I'll have time to become an expert at it."

Monica shuddered a little.

"It is splendid for them to have men like you out there. They come to us at Linnorie after they have been through your hands, and we patch them up and nurse them back to health, and they're so brave and splendid, poor boys. I just can't speak about it."

"Linnorie should do them good. I've never seen the place, only heard about it from Miss Heron, and they're lucky chaps to be under the same roof with you."

Jimmy was getting on. His eyes, with a strange new boldness, fixed themselves on her sweet and now conscious face.

Monica was blushing when Beatrice opened the door to precede Lizzie with the laden tea-tray, and in that moment hope and desire were born in her heart, that these two, so eminently fitted to make one another happy, should find it out, so that Jimmy's wound might be healed, and the memory of the girl who had played him false wiped out for ever.

They had a very merry tea party, only slightly chastened by the strange web of circumstance that had brought them together. And though Monica had told him for what purpose she had come to see Beatrice Heron, Jimmy seemed to find it difficult to remove himself.

At last, however, he reluctantly rose and said he would have to make himself scarce.

"Won't you come out to Linnorie and see our hospital? Mother would like to see you as you are the very last person who could give her direct news of John."

"I would like to come beyond everything," Jimmy answered with an eagerness which raised in Beatrice an inward smile. "Can I come to-morrow?"

"He has only five days' leave, Monica," said Beatrice, gently encouraging. "Let him come to-morrow."

"Of course, come to-morrow," she said and laid her hand in his, and then Beatrice took him out to the door.

"You shouldn't have put your oar in," he said whimsically. "Maybe you've headed me to undoing and destruction!"

"No, no, to something far, far better, Jimmy," she said with a quick note of passion in her voice. "I don't pray as often or as fervently as I ought, but I know what is going to be my heart's sincere desire now till it becomes an accomplished fact."

Jimmy, with his hand at the salute, and a queer, half tender, half ironical smile in his kind deep eyes, went down the stairs.

CHAPTER XXVII

BEATRICE, surprised at her own emotion, some wind of the spirit come whence she knew not, wiped her eyes in the little passage before she returned to the sitting-room. She had time now to wonder what had brought Monica Brodie to her ; something proclaiming that it was not just an ordinary call. They had not met since that day when Mrs. Brodie came for the purpose of finding out something regarding which she felt some curiosity. But since that day Beatrice and Monica could not be as strangers, some bond had been forged between them and remained.

They smiled at one another when Beatrice re-entered, closing the door behind her.

"Who is that nice man?" Monica asked quite directly. "Where does he belong?"

Beatrice explained, adding some embroideries of her own to emphasise Jimmy's good qualities and general eligibility. Monica listened politely, but evidently with wandering thoughts, and she made no comment on the information received.

"Don't you wonder why I've come here to-day?" was Monica's next question.

"I'm so glad to see you I don't want to ask any questions. Now I come to think of it I always thought you would come again one day."

"I'm glad you have felt like that. It explains your kind welcome," said Monica with a warm, quick flush. "I've often thought of coming really, but somehow there seems to be less time than there used to be."

"More to put into it," suggested Beatrice.

Monica gave a little sigh.

"A prodigious amount to put into it. I've come to tell you something, Beatrice. May I call you that? It sounds so much less formal."

"Why, of course. Haven't I always thought of you as Monica?"

The girl's face brightened at that, and she was silent for a few seconds.

"I need advice," she said then. "Something very odd and rather painful has happened in my life."

"What?" asked Beatrice, sitting forward eagerly.

"My mother is going to marry again."

Beatrice looked the surprise and the instinctive disapproval she felt. Little more than two years had passed since Compton Brodie's tragic end, though the crowding of events seemed to make the years seem longer.

She did not say anything, and Monica went on.

"It is an American officer; she is going to marry one of the volunteers who have joined with our forces while they are waiting to come in. His name is Colonel Wardlaw Page."

"How did they meet?" Beatrice asked.

"At Linnorie. He knew John out in France, and taking some leave in England came up to see us."

Beatrice, annoyed because she could not even at this late day hear the casual mention of John Brodie's name without looking and feeling conscious, put her hand up to her face.

"I hope," she said in a low voice, "that he is not a very young man?"

"Oh no, about forty-four. Mother isn't old you know. She was only forty-five in January. She was married at seventeen."

"As I remember her, she looks very young," said Beatrice. "Are they going to be married soon?"

"Immediately, and he wants to take mother over to America and wait there with his people till they all come into the war."

"How strange! Do you like him?"

"Yes; he's all right, but I don't want him to marry mother. I disapprove of second marriages. Do you think they ever are successful? You have a step-mother, so you must know."

"There are successful ones I am sure, but there are

more risks about second marriages than first ones," said Beatrice, her mind full of Lotta and the queer alien element she had introduced into their family life. "But a stepfather would be easier, I should think. One would not need to see so much of him."

"There's that, of course, but it won't make much difference to me. Colonel Page is a widower. He has one son and he is apparently very rich."

"Will you not go to America too, then?"

Monica shook a most decisive head.

"Nothing would induce me, even if there was no war. Besides, we can't close the hospital. Mother is the commandant, you know, and I'm the quarter-master and general factotum. I'm learning to nurse, too. Sister is most awfully good to me; they all are, and I simply love the work."

"What will you do about it, then?"

"That's what I came to ask you about. Can you suggest anything?"

"Only getting another commandant, if there is nothing else to prevent you carrying on."

"There is nothing else. Mother is willing. She's been splendid about the hospital really, and we've got to understand one another better. And now she's so different, almost like a girl. Oh, Beatrice, don't you think life is wonderful, and rather awful? Just think, only two years since poor father died, and then it seemed the end of all things, and now here is mother looking about five and twenty, with a devoted lover and a new life opening out in front. She's very happy, really. I don't know whether to smile or to cry about it."

"Smile," said Beatrice bravely, "and carry a high head. I should have been dead long ago but for that."

Into Monica Brodie's soft eyes crept a deep wistfulness. Drawn by invisible cords towards the woman in front of her, yet she was conscious, even as her brother had been, of a remoteness, a strain of pride, which made approach difficult. She was in ignorance of what had passed between John and Beatrice Heron, for he had shut down that page of his life with a sharp and resolute hand. Monica had come full of the enthusiasm, almost trembling

with eagerness, to offer a proposition concerning Linnorie, but now was hesitating.

"Mother is willing for me to try and carry on for another six months at least. She says that if America really comes into the war, and Colonel Page has to come back with his regiment, she will come with him, and wait here. But there is the interval, how am I to get over that? She says I must find somebody, the right kind of person, or she won't let me. Poor mother thinks we need chaperons yet. She's the old-fashioned sort."

"But surely there should not be much difficulty," said Beatrice. "You must have a large circle of friends?"

"But that is exactly what we haven't got," explained Monica rather pathetically. "You see, when mother found that the people round about persisted in believing that Linnorie could not possibly pass altogether away from the Herons, she took, what shall I call it, a kind of spite at the place and the people. We were always going away to other places, and so really we never have taken root in this part of Scotland. It means now that there isn't a single person among our so-called friends I could ask to do this. Besides, it isn't just every one, or anyone, that would be suitable."

"I'm trying to think. It is not a nurse you want, I presume, but somebody who possesses administrative qualities and common sense and who would be easy to live with?"

"Exactly, and that kind of person isn't in the least easy to find. Mother and I were trying to make a list last night, and it was quite disgustingly short, and most of the names could have been stroked out. You see, all the worth-while people are either in France or working at munitions or something here."

"Oh, surely, there must be an odd one left here and there," said Beatrice with a faint protesting smile.

"Well, there's you," said Monica boldly. "And that's why I'm here. Would you—could you come to Linnorie, Miss Heron, while mother is away?"

The blood mounted to Beatrice Heron's face and stayed there for a full minute before it receded, leaving it almost white.

"Oh, I don't think so," she said in a tone which her great effort made very cold and even hard. "I haven't got any of the qualities we've been tabulating. I have not much experience of administration."

"But you must have some. Haven't you carried on quite successfully here while Madame Theodore has been in America? Odd, isn't it, that gaps should have been created in both our lives by America?"

"I've got along all right, but there is a difference between engineering a small business and a big concern like a hospital. How many patients have you?"

"Thirty, but we're getting the long gallery, the top one, you know, ready, and that will give us twelve more beds. Apparently"—she added pitifully—"they are all going to be needed."

"Then there is the common sense and—and other things. I want to serve dreadfully, of course, every woman does, and the moment Madame Theodore comes back I shall go to France if I can get a little niche to fill or anybody to find me a job. I don't care what it is. I could cook or scrub in a canteen, I'd not be too particular."

"Every woman would like to go to France of course. Colonel Page says the women of his country are just crazy, and the rich ones are literally buying openings over here. But don't you think there are things to be done at home, too? If you saw these broken men, Beatrice, and their gratitude for what we give them, I'm sure you'd say the home work is needed even more perhaps than the work over there."

Beatrice swallowed something in her throat. She was tempted, mightily tempted, but at the back of her mind was the wall of pride and prejudice which held her back.

She had taken a vow to hold aloof from all bearing the name of Brodie; had scorned herself for the weakness which had once sent a little womanly appeal fluttering through the night air to John Brodie, and though all the values had changed, and one by one her preconceived ideas of what should and should not be were being shaken, something held her back.

"I don't think I could. I shall never forget that you have asked me, but—but it is impossible."

Her tone was final. A little fluttering sigh escaped Monica's lips.

"I'm sorry, but when you speak like that I seem to know that there are reasons I must not ask. Well, I shall just have to try and find somebody. Mother spoke of handing over Linnorie for a time to the military authorities and letting them administer it. I suppose I should stop on, but it would not be the same. And I'm sure they'd do wrong things with it, at least it would be run on different lines altogether."

She rose and began to pull on her gloves.

"Don't you think life is difficult, Beatrice? There are days when every door seems to be shut. And really most of us are very lonely. We haven't heard from Jack for three weeks, and we are simply being gnawed up with anxiety. He did tell us that we needn't expect to hear as regularly, for he was going forward to break some new ground. He wrote very guardedly, but both mother and I came to the conclusion that he was going into some fresh and special danger. That is where he would be always, of course, and the more forlorn the hope the more certain he would be there. It is very glorious, but it gives one an awful feeling, as if the foundations of the earth were rocking, and soon not a square inch of solid ground would be left for any of us to stand on."

Something icy cold gripped at Beatrice Heron's heart, and her lips snapped together so that their line became hard and inscrutable.

Monica saw the change of expression without comprehending what it meant.

"Well, I must be off. Thank you for being so kind to me and giving me tea. I have the feeling I ought not to have bothered you with my troubles, but they seem to multiply, and as I said when one comes to count friends, real friends, not many fingers are needed."

"Oh, count me, yet! I'd do anything for you, my dear," cried Beatrice with a quick note of passion in her voice.

Monica smiled a little unsteadily.

"Think over Linnorie, then! I'll wait forty-eight hours," she said at parting. "I don't know of course

what is holding you back, but I can imagine it. You have a queer feeling about coming back to live in your old home in such altered circumstances, and after all the tragedy connected with it. But don't you see, don't you see, suffering and the mercy which is trying to make it less is purging Linnorie of all its bitter memories. If you came I have the queer feeling that the atonement would be complete. It would mean that we were forgiven."

She went with that, and Beatrice, conscience-stricken, did not dare either to answer or to follow her. Little Monica, whose soft eyes looked more deeply into things than those glancing at her casually could have imagined possible, had summed the situation up in a most masterly manner and left Beatrice Heron without a word to say. She moved mechanically over to the window and sat down on the low seat which filled its embrasure and looked across the huddled roofs towards the sea.

Strange shapes, menacing shapes, now drifted to and fro from the great naval base where so many war secrets were hidden, and the peaceful shining highway of commerce had become one of the most important and vital avenues of war. But it was looking soft and lovely as in old-time peace days now, and the declining sun had laid a long level track of glory from the west. A thousand strange new thoughts and feelings struggled in Beatrice Heron's heart. She was being pulled this way and that. But Linnorie beckoned her, oh undoubtedly it did! The call to service had come in a guise which she had not the right to refuse. Within a week Madame Theodore would be back, and there was ample time to make any fresh arrangements for the carrying on of the business before Mrs. Brodie should sail for the new world with her new husband.

She had very little thought to spare for Mrs. Brodie, who was outside her scheme of things. Asked for an opinion regarding her second venture in matrimony, she would have answered that she was a woman of a shallow, selfish nature, who would naturally take whatever good might happen to offer, without thought or consideration for its effect on the lives of others. In this conclusion she

was not wholly just to Maud Brodie, who, in the second spring which blooms in some few lives, had opened out as a flower opens to the sun. She had won by some strange process the affection and esteem of a good man, an high-souled American gentleman, of good family and ample means, and there is no doubt would carry into her new life with him the power and the will to make him happy.

Beatrice might have smiled at such a suggestion. While her experience during the last two and a half poignant years had broadened her in some directions, it had not had the direct effect of softening her. She had been too much shut off from sweeter influences, too much shut in on herself. Although her business life brought her into contact with numbers of people, her inner life was most solitary and isolated. She made no new friends, and was often too tired to care to go out at night to visit the few old ones who still remembered her. She suddenly that evening realised how much she *was* cut off. Jimmy Grier's friendly face and Monica Brodie's offer of comradeship had assisted in that revelation.

For the first time in her experience she felt the desire to go out and talk to somebody about herself. There was always Alison Grier ready and willing to lend a sympathetic ear, though in addition to her parish and household duties she had taken up work at a canteen three evenings a week. She seldom saw her stepmother now, but had heard from Alison Grier that her boarding-house was full. There had been very little communication between her and Lotta since Ida's marriage. Some things said at that time had rankled in both their minds. Beatrice was conscious of a new kindness towards the whole world as she made her way down to the familiar little house at Trinity, of a desire to have more traffic with her kind. It had been bad for her to cut herself off as she had done all these long months. Even if she did not go to Linnorie, and she imagined she had decided against that, she would immediately seek and find some war work either at home or abroad. Madame Theodore's return must set her free ; on that she was determined.

When she reached " The Outlook " it was just half-past

six, and she could smell the odour of cooking as she approached the gate.

A strange damsel she had never before seen, answered her ring, and in reply to her inquiry for Mrs. Heron looked doubtful. But Lotta, listening at the top of the stairs in a *négligée*, with her hairbrush in her hand, heard the familiar voice and called out to her.

"That's your voice, I think, Bee! Come up. Surely it's the deluge to bring you here."

Beatrice smiled into the girl's face, and made her way up the familiar narrow stairs. Lotta was waiting on the landing presenting a very friendly face, and they kissed one another by some odd mutual consent.

"Whatever's brought you? I've been wondering whether you were dead or alive," she said good-humouredly.

"I'm sorry I've been so long. I just don't know how the time goes," Beatrice answered. "Yes, I'm quite well; so are you, if looks mean anything. You look years younger."

"Do I?" Lotta laughed in a quite well-pleased way and stood aside for her stepdaughter to pass into the room. "Things are going pretty well with me. We're crowded out of this house, and in spite of rationing and all the rest of it I'm making money. I'm thinking of taking Seafeld, where Ida and Weile used to live."

Beatrice looked inexpressibly surprised.

"What has happened there?"

"Oh, nothing; it is just as it was when they left it. I've been in communication with the Scotch member of the firm and I'm getting it at a cheap rent. It's a beautiful house, and I can take four more boarders. I can get officers if I like now."

"The authorities haven't made any objection, then?"

"Oh, no; how could they? They never proved anything against Weile, you know, though they got up the usual scares about wireless and all that in the house. Besides, he was naturalised. They'd have interned him, I suppose, if he'd stopped on. Of course he knew all right what was coming. Looking back I can remember

lots of queer things he said and did. That's why he sent Ida away last July."

"I suppose you haven't heard anything about or from her? I've only had the one letter."

"And I've had none. She's paying for her whistle over there, I should think. Well, and how are you getting on? Are they still buying frocks and hats up in George Street?"

"A few, not so many now. I'm expecting Madame Theodore back this week or next."

"Are you? And what will happen then; will she come in again?"

"I hope she will, for I want to get off and do some work in the war."

Beatrice sat down on the front of Lotta's bed, a very dainty pink-covered affair, and began to pull off her gloves.

"Fed up with business? Isn't it paying, then?"

"Oh, yes; but there isn't anything but the war now, Lotta, and whoever stands out of it hasn't the right to live."

"Rather a high-handed attitude, I think," said Lotta as she deftly coiled her still abundant hair about her head. "After all, there are civilian things to be done, too. I'm taking in a lot of decent fellows who would be fleeced elsewhere. That's my war work. Will you stop and have a bite of dinner to-night and see the crowd?"

"I don't mind if I do. It's very kind of you to ask me, Lotta. I haven't paid you much attention of late."

"Oh, I don't bear any grudges, and I've got on without any help either from you or Ida. I've always been self-supporting, you know, not too proud to turn my hand to anything. I said to you once, I think, that the most stupid thing I ever did was to marry your father, and that he took me in. I'm sorry I said that. I take it back. His name has been very useful to me, and brought me kudos in all sorts of ways."

Beatrice's eyes softened still further.

"We all say things that would be better unsaid, and I'm sorry if I ever hurt your feelings. I think I rather want your advice, Lotta, to-night, after all. I was

going down to Mrs. Grier, but I've just remembered it's her canteen night and she'd be too busy to speak to me."

"Well, what is it about? If it's anything of a business nature you might do worse than consult yours truly," said Lotta, immensely pleased with what she decided was a change for the better in her elder stepdaughter.

"I had a visit from Monica Brodie this afternoon."

"You had?"

Lotta paused in her task of getting into rather a tight, black satin skirt and looked interestedly into her stepdaughter's face.

"She came to tell me two things—at least, to tell me one, and ask another. Mrs. Brodie is getting married again."

"No? Well, she hasn't worn the willow long. Anything good, eh?"

"An American colonel, who has lots of money, and she's going away to America with him."

"Well?"

"They've been running a hospital at Linnorie since last September, quite a big hospital."

"Now who told me about that, I wonder? I seem to have heard it somewhere," said Lotta in a puzzled voice. "Well, what else?"

"She asked me if I'd go out and help her to carry on after her mother goes away. She's the commandant at present, and it would mean that I would take her place."

"You'll go, of course?"

"I've refused her, but I think I was wrong. What do you think, Lotta?"

"I don't think, I just know that you've got to go there. I'm not in the least surprised. I always knew at the back of my mind that you'd go back to Linnorie sooner or later."

Beatrice looked ineffably surprised.

"I don't know what you mean, Lotta. Even if I went to Linnorie now it would only be for a month or two to accommodate the Brodies till Mrs. Brodie comes back. When America comes into the war, Colonel Page will return immediately with his own men."

"That may be, but all the same, I don't see you turning out of Linnorie for her once you are in."

Lotta turned to the dressing table with these words and, as she arranged her bodice lace, had in the mirror a very good view of her stepdaughter's face. It was deeply flushed, but Lotta took no notice, though it did not escape her.

"There's the first of the boys coming in, and the gong will be going presently. Want to wash your hands or anything? Wait half a mo, and I'll get you a drop of hot water."

"I can go to the bath-room," said Beatrice, jumping up.

"You'd better not. They go there to wash their hands; saves a lot of water carrying. I've trained them well," said Lotta, with a little smile. "My, but you've got a colour," she added mischievously.

Beatrice laughed rather awkwardly and turned away.

CHAPTER XXVIII

BEATRICE enjoyed her evening at "The Outlook," and, pondering over everything, wondered whether she had imagined Lotta to be a wholly impossible person in days gone by, or whether she had really improved out of all knowledge. It was difficult to associate the gracious, smiling, kindly woman, whom evidently her paying guests regarded with both affection and respect, with the angry virago who had stormed and shouted over Ida's engagement to the German. She felt glad that the change had come, from whatever direction, and her brief flutter into the social atmosphere of Lotta's house had lifted part of her gloom. As she walked out of the little cul-de-sac about half-past eight, after promising to come again soon and to let Lotta know what was going to happen to her, she smiled a little at the words which had followed her from the gate :

"You needn't let me know unless you like, for of course I *shall* know, and most likely your letter will come from Linnorie."

What had ranged Lotta among the prophets? How did she speak with such positive assurance on the point which was causing Beatrice such concern? There is no doubt at all that her stepmother's unhesitating opinion and verdict not only weighed with her but pleased her.

At the end of the little street she paused irresolute, her judgment advising her to go home, her inclination sending her towards the Manse of Little Trinity in the hope that she might find Alison there. The latter prevailed, and she hastened her footsteps to cover the quarter of an hour's distance in front. It might mean that she would miss the last car, but the distance did not appal her. She felt a sudden renewal of physical vigour born, though

she was not aware of it, of some inner joy of the spirit connected with Linnorie.

She had not to go all the way to the Manse. At a junction of roads she suddenly came up against Alison hurrying home with her little satchel over her arm. Her surprise was great as they stopped to greet one another.

"Of course you're on your way to the Manse; come along," said Alison affectionately.

"I was thinking of it, but how are you off so early? I thought you did not usually get back till about ten."

"I don't as a rule, but to-night I cried off and got somebody to take my place. It isn't every night we've a returned hero, you know," she said, her eye kindling with pride. "You've seen Jimmy? Don't you think he's a darling and tremendously improved?"

Alison put the question with a searching look, the significance of which was entirely lost on Beatrice.

She was quite unaware of the dreams the minister's wife cherished regarding her and Jimmy, how she had decided in her own mind that they were made for one another.

"He's changed," said Beatrice with a slight smile.

"For the better of course?" said Alison feverishly. "You should see the boys hanging over him. To them he's the incarnation of wonder and glory; their own Uncle Jimmy back from the war. He'll be covered with real glory yet, Bee, and decorations, or my name isn't Alison Grier. Come along, what are you hanging back for?"

"I don't think I'll come after all now I've seen you, Alison. You see if I do I'll miss the last car."

"Never mind, Jimmy will see you home; he'd glory in it."

"But I shouldn't; I'd not be afraid to walk home ever so late, but I don't think I'll come. I've been to see Lotta; dined at her table in fact. If you'll let me ask you one question I'll say good night and be off."

"Surely! as many questions as you like. I met Mrs. Heron one day in a shop not long ago, and she asked me whether you were dead and I had attended the funeral.

From that I gathered you hadn't been at 'The Outlook' for a long time."

"Not for months," Beatrice acknowledged, and something in the tone made Alison look at her more narrowly.

"You don't look very happy, dear," she said in her clear, gentle voice.

"Happy! How could any of us be happy? I am always thinking of Wally out there, among the mud and the horrors, and now I shall be thinking of Jimmy and all the rest, and I'm doing nothing."

"Ordinary things have to be carried on," said Alison bravely, but her eyes visibly shadowed. "I'm always telling Donald that. He's wild to go, and now Jimmy's been talking to him I don't think I shall be able to keep him."

"Don't try, Alison. After the war is over there will be only two sorts of men in the world, those who went to the war and those who stayed at home. That brings me to the question I want to ask you. Monica Brodie came to see me this afternoon."

"I know. Jimmy told me, and he's going out to Linnorie to-morrow afternoon. They seemed to get to know one another very quickly."

"Did they?" There was a vague note in Beatrice's voice which indicated some wandering detachment in her thought. "She asked me to come and help her to run the war hospital there."

"But how strange! Isn't Mrs. Brodie doing it?"

"She's getting married again and going to America," Beatrice explained for the second time with a slight air of weariness. "I am expecting Madame Theodore back. Do you think I should go to Linnorie, Alison?"

"Do you want to?"

Beatrice shivered slightly, though the night air was warm and kindly.

"I don't know. I seem to be two persons. You know when father died I took a sort of vow to be done with the Brodies; to have no more to do with them in any shape or form, and then——"

"And then, what?" asked Alison, gently compelling, for she saw that the deeps of her friend's heart were stirred in some odd and perplexing fashion.

"Well, John Brodie came home and I saw him, and we talked things over." Beatrice came to a full stop there, and Alison pushed her hand through her arm and they began to walk up and down on the quiet stretch of the road where at that hour there were very few pedestrians.

"But I don't just see what this has to do with your going to Linnorie."

"It has everything to do with it. I wish I could tell you, Alison, but somehow I can't."

"Perhaps I can guess," said Alison softly. "Something happened more than ordinary business talk between you and him."

"You are wonderful, Alison ; yes, you are quite right. That is what happened. He asked me to marry him."

"Well, it was within his rights. It is any man's right to ask a woman that question ; it is the highest honour he can pay her."

"I refused him."

"I am not surprised. Well, what now ? "

"Don't be dense, Alison, you know perfectly well why I am hesitating. I might have to see him there. He would most certainly come, and the less I wanted him the more certainly he would turn up."

"It's a very little thing to stand in the way of the war work you are so keen on," said Alison dryly, not fully understanding her friend's scruples.

"Then, again, he might stay away if he heard I was there. It is his home where he ought to come when he has leave, or he might even have to come through being wounded or sick. Don't you think it would be better if I didn't go ? "

Alison hesitated a moment, then began to speak in a low voice which had a rich deep note in it.

"You are feeling what I have often felt, Bee, that we don't have enough of sign-posts in life. So often we seem to come to the parting of the ways and then we don't know which direction to take. I've often been there myself. I'm there now about Donald and the chaplaincy he's dying to apply for. But I'm not worrying very much. It's wonderful, don't you think ? "

"What ? That you don't worry ? But then you have

a sunny, easygoing nature, Alison, you're not a girder against circumstances like me."

"Don't call yourself names, my dear, and listen to me. What I'm trying to point out to you is that we are really helped and guided more than we know."

"Are we?" There was a note of gloom in Beatrice's voice. "I don't feel it. I'm afraid I've lost the habit of faith, Alison. I don't hold on any longer."

"No, no; I can't listen to that. That is the greatest of all losses, and it's not going to happen to you. You are too fine for such a cheap surrender. Why don't you come oftener and hear Donald of a Sunday. I'm his wife of course, but he's splendid on the war, and the times we are living in. I'm helped every Sunday, and so are the crowds who come to hear him. I just don't know where they come from, but they're there. That's what I tell him all the time. Who is going to minister to these people if he leaves them?"

"Perhaps after all you shouldn't let him go, Alison. We need men like him who can keep others going. As for me, I'm a cumberer of the ground."

Alison perceived that some of the dark forces ever on the alert to work their will in human souls had got a grip of her friend. Love and the happiest of all service had made her wise, as it makes wise quite ordinary women, touching them with the divinity which helps to shape human lives and lead them home.

"You're down on your luck, old girl," she said affectionately. "But of course you're going to Linnorie. I've always known you'd go back there. The stars in their courses decreed it from the beginning of time."

Beatrice started, half afraid. For the second time in one night she heard the assertion, almost savouring of prophecy, and something in her own heart gave it a mighty response. Her veiled eyes in the darkness began to glow strangely; she was tempted for one moment to tell Alison the whole story of that brief but poignant interlude with John Brodie which had been compassed between the space of minutes, thus shattering all her preconceived ideas and conventions as to how a love affair should be conducted. She forgot that no hard and

fast rule can be laid down ; that the Preacher himself proclaimed as one of the insolvable mysteries the way of a man with a maid.

"Just sit tight, darling," said Alison of the tender voice, and the brimming happy heart. "Things will come right, they always do."

"We have to help," said Beatrice in a stifled voice. "And I'm doing nothing."

"I won't hear you say that. The splendid fight you've made, the big drastic step you took at the beginning have never failed to fill Donald and me with admiration. It cost you something. I know, you're not a Heron for nothing. It was an object lesson to greed and selfishness and peevish discontent. It even helped your stepmother and brought her back to the wage earning class, and see how fine she is now. I thought her very face had changed that day I met her in the shop."

"I did nothing for my own sister, Alison. If I'd stopped at home and helped to run the boarding-house I might have saved her from Weile."

Alison could not help her face shadowing, for at the back of her mind she never dared to think about poor Ida Heron, shut up in the enemy's country at the mercy of those who had their fingers at her country's throat, and who were determined from the highest to the lowest to bring her to the dust. But the rôle of comforter being pre-eminently her own, she spoke up cheerfully.

"Now what is the use of taking that black view ? If Ida hadn't married Weile, she might have done something worse ; you never know ; she might have run off with a Tommy, adding to the long woeful list of war marriages which are giving folk like us some of the biggest problems we've ever had to tackle."

"A Scotch Tommy, Alison, why I'd have been proud of that, no matter where he had sprung from."

Alison made a wry face.

"You think you would be ; now listen, Bee ! I saw Ida a good many times when she was living at Seafeld. Donald kept on making me go, often when I couldn't in the least be bothered. He said I'd got to keep a hold of her as you weren't going there half enough."

She saw Beatrice wince, but held on courageously :

"It's not a reproach to you, dear. I know how you loathed Weile, but I saw a good deal of him. Donald and I went to dinner once or twice."

"Did you?" asked Beatrice, filled with wonder. "And never said a word about it."

"What was the use? The very mention of your brother-in-law was like a red rag to a bull," said Alison calmly. "But we'll let that flea stick to the wall. What I'm trying to tell you is that I'm certain, so is Donald, we've often spoken about it, that he was very fond of her."

"That kind of fondness!" cried Beatrice in ineffable scorn. "The only kind his kind and race are capable of."

"He took great care of her. She was sometimes trying, you know, Bee, for she never had your poise. And he put up with her a lot, even I could see. I'm not defending the man. It was a tragedy Ida marrying him, but the thing was to make the best of it, to try and build up, instead of persistently pulling down."

"As I do, Alison. Now I know what you think of me," said Beatrice in a nettled voice, which did not cause Alison Grier the smallest perturbation. Through the wisdom much experience of human nature and life, beside which Beatrice Heron's was that of a babe in arms, she perceived that her friend required shaking up. It is never a pleasant process for the victim of the shaking, nevertheless Alison held on.

"You can't better the thing. I am as certain as I stand here that Ida is being taken care of in Germany, probably she's away in some remote kindly place where the echoes of the war can't reach her."

"A fortress more than likely," said Beatrice grimly.

"Well, it might be a fortress, there are worse places in war time. You must get rid of this idea that you're responsible for Ida, for Linnorie, for the money your father lost in business. You're not a universal providence, but just an ordinary human woman, with a life to live. For Heaven's sake set about living it, and let other people have peace. That's all God requires from

you at this moment if I know anything about Him, and He has never failed me yet ! ”

She paused breathless with her own vehemence and tried to look into Beatrice Heron's half-averted face. She could just see in the dim light of the rising moon that her mouth was quivering.

“ So that is how I seem to the only friends I have in the world ? ”

Alison laughed ever so slightly.

“ It doesn't alter our love, dear. That will never fail. You have a way of binding folks to you with hooks of steel. But you take a lot of knowing, you're hedged about with something which looks uncommonly like the barbed wire we're all so deadly sick of. It doesn't do in life, darling. Barbed wire entrenchments play the very dickens with happiness. Give yourself a chance. Go out to Linnorie and forget everything but the boys who will adore you if you'll let them. They have me in tears every night at the canteen. They're such big bairns needing such a lot of mothering. I'll come out and see you one of these days soon, and behold the miracle of Beatrice crowned and come into her kingdom. Good night. I've preached my sermon on the pavement to a congregation of one, and I'll not be able to sleep a wink because of it.”

She kissed Beatrice stormily and ran off unheeding of the faint call which sought to bring her back. She had said enough, perhaps more than enough, and besides was weary of it. She discerned that Beatrice Heron was in that sad case when mountains appear as molehills, and vision has become circumscribed.

She burst in on Donald and his brother with a very queer expression on her face.

“ Oh, Donald Grier, I've taken over your job to-night and preached a sermon on the pavement to a congregation of one ! And I don't know whether my head or my heels are uppermost, and I'm afraid I've sent Beatrice Heron home with a bee in her bonnet.”

“ What's up ? ” asked the minister, his keen eyes lighting up with a vivid interest.

Alison sat down on the arm of his chair, leaned against

him, threw her hat on the floor, and ruffled her hair with both hands. Then she gave a brief sketch of what had passed.

"I had to do it, something goaded me. What do you think will happen now?"

"It'll do good," Donald decided, and his arm round her waist tightened comfortingly.

Alison suddenly pinned Jimmy with her bright, steadfast eyes.

"How did you get on at Linnorie? Do you think there is a corner for Beatrice Heron there?"

"Oh yes, they're getting ready for her," said Jimmy in a non-committal voice.

"Did Mrs. Brodie speak about it?"

Jimmy nodded.

"They seem to think it's all settled."

"Just what I said to Beatrice. A lovely place, isn't it, Jimmy?"

"Lovely, and the chaps who come to it out of the hell over there are to be envied, and pitied too, for when they have to go back!"

"It'll do Beatrice good," said Alison, and rose diverted from her misgivings by something she saw in Jimmy's eyes. Her dream remained, but one of the principals had changed.

All good and happy women love a love story, and watch its unfolding with a breathless and benign interest. They want the happy ending. They will work for it, given a chance. Already Alison Grier saw the vision of two happy couples, brought together by destiny for the comfort of one another and the building of such homes as are vital to the State, and of which we cannot have too many. The way might be thorny for their feet, but that they would arrive she had not the faintest doubt. And gradually the storm was calmed within and she lifted her sweet face and kissed her man before Jimmy with a happy sigh.

"Oh, but you two good dears are comforting. I wish there were more of you; it would be a better world," she said, and passing by Jimmy, kissed him too and floated from the room. The brothers looked at one

another solemnly blinking for a full minute through the smoke of their pipes.

"She's been upset, poor lass, but I'd like t^o have heard her on Beatrice Heron," said the minister at last.

"She's grand, Donald—I wonder——"

"You wonder what?"

"Whether you know how well off you are with her! I've often envied you."

"Don't!" said Donald, and his pipe seemed to have lost its savour, for he laid it down with a jerk. "We've had some hard days in our time, too, Jimmy, but nothing has ever come between us. She's always been the happy comrade, and for grumbling, my God, she doesn't know what it means."

"That's what I'm meaning when I say you don't know how well off you are. Why aren't there more like her born?"

Donald could not answer.

"I hope there's one waiting for you yet, lad. You'll never be the man you ought to be till you find her."

"I saw her to-day, Donald, at Linnorie, and I'll have her yet if I get through." Jimmy's young face was working, the brothers clasped hands by common impulse, and Donald Grier had one more vital petition added to the list he kept hidden in the deepest recesses of a believing heart.

CHAPTER XXIX

BEATRICE HERON stood a brief instant staring after Alison Grier with a slightly bewildered look in her eyes. She felt as one might feel meeting in a sheltered place a wholly unexpected and rather rude gust of wind. It was the first time in the history of their happy and true friendship that Alison had failed to give the help and sympathy asked for.

But had she failed? Quick as a flash of lightning that question thrust its impudent head forward and Beatrice almost gasped. Perhaps it was the truth she had heard for the first time.

As she began to move a little blindly on her homeward way, one by one Alison's drastic, clear-cut sentences came back, smiting both ear and consciousness with deepened significance.

"You must get rid of the idea that you are responsible for Ida, for Linnorie, for the money your father lost in business. You're not a universal Providence, but just an ordinary human woman with a life to live. For heaven's sake begin living it, and let other people have peace."

If that was how she appeared to a sane, well-balanced, warmhearted woman like Alison Grier, there could be little doubt but that the estimate was just. It was she who had failed, while imagining herself dwelling on the starry and clear heights, which lesser folk failed to reach. Even Lotta, deserted by everybody, had at the crisis taken hold with both hands firmly of the work that offered and had made it good.

What had she done in George Street beyond getting a living for herself and offering a shelter to Lizzie Henderson, who waited on her hand and foot?

She had made a little money it is true, but in the

process had narrowed the confines of her soul, feeding it on scorn for the people whom she served, while giving in exchange for their gold what artistic talent she possessed.

She had no illusions at all about that talent, it was circumscribed and already had begun to move in a vicious circle. What is fashion, after all, but a cycle, a repetition of old modelling, of ideas that have been handed down? The really artistic creation that deserves to be classed or perpetuated as such, is very rare; where it exists in perfection it is not for sale. Beatrice Heron had a talent, a nice perception which enabled her to unite a correct taste with a pretty knack of handling materials, but there it ended.

And she was deadly sick of it all, of the protracted conversations lasting an hour or hours, on whether a frock should have trimming of lace or something else, whether this style or the other suited the woman who wanted it, often one whom nature had not intended for the flaunting of pretty clothes, but rather to blush unseen in simple garb by the wayside.

Oh, it was all a pretty comedy of pretence, imagination, grotesqueness, call it what you will. Beatrice suddenly saw it with a merciless clearness, and having seen it, took her stand.

She would go to Linnorie, and take a hand in big human things, where suffering and sacrifice, illumined by pity and love, would wipe out all memory of lesser and more sordid affairs.

She would try to forget herself, as Alison Grier forgot herself, in all the hours of every day that dawned.

How happy she was; what radiance soft and comforting beamed from her clear human eyes. She had walked long years on the shady side of life in a narrow way where little of this world's good came, but love had companioned her, giving her the compensation which has no rival nor equal on the face of the earth.

The love which is of the valley had beckoned her and she had obeyed the call, not hesitating, nor asking what money or position or other material gifts he had to offer. And lo, all gifts were hers! She had lived from day to day, neither looking back nor forward, like the birds,

not one of whom falls to the ground without the Father's knowledge.

That was a chastening hour for Beatrice Heron. She saw how she had complicated life for herself and others, how getting hold of an ideal which, noble in itself, she had somehow made an obsession, so that it had suffered by her handling. She had weighted herself with responsibilities to which she was not called. She had stood aloof while others needed something from her, strong and righteous in her own conception of where duty lay. She lifted wet eyes to the soft April sky, hastening her footsteps as if she would undo the evil she had wrought.

In her passion of acknowledgment she might easily have wrought confusion by some hurried plan of retrieval.

She was capable of closing the doors of Madame Theodore's salons on the morrow with the simple announcement that business was suspended through the war. But she was saved from such disaster by a timely intervention. When as ten o'clock was pealing from the church bells, tired in body but uplifted in spirit, she reached the door of the flat, and fumbled for her key, she heard distinctly the murmur of voices within. Her fingers trembled on the key, but at last she got it open, and then the crowding of travelling gear in the little hall prepared her for the sight of Madame Theodore in the front salon, where at ease in a very elegant travelling gown of American manufacture, she found her old friend smiling happily at Lizzie's chatter.

She rose leisurely, grown a little stouter, perhaps, but her comeliness in no way diminished thereby.

"There you are, my dear. Yes, it's really me! Why didn't I write or wire? I'm sure I couldn't tell you. I just had a fancy to drop in like this."

They kissed one another with a genuine affection; Theodora Duncan noting certain subtle changes in her protégée, and marvelling a little at them. She was certainly thinner and older; there were more lines on her face than her years justified; she did not look happy, but careworn. All these things did her old friend note, and inwardly digest.

"You've been working too hard, my dear. Look at me! I've taken on a stone, living on the fat of the land, and consuming quantities of ice-cream without the smallest insult to my interior, that's the queer thing."

"You look splendid, and certainly years younger!" cried Beatrice quickly. "I'm so sorry I was out. I'll never forgive myself. I hope Lizzie attended to you properly?"

"She did that. She gave me a very good supper, and the best cup of coffee I've drunk since I left New York. Well, and here we are again, and it's glad I am to be back!"

"But you have enjoyed yourself and had a good time," said Beatrice, getting down on her knees by the hearth and holding out her cool fingers to the cheerful spark of the wood fire.

"I have that, it's a grand country, Bee; you'll need to go there some day. I'm going back, yes, after the war, but only if they come in. I've told them so."

"Why don't they come; what is holding them back?"

"Things it would take me too long to tell you at this moment. They'll emerge bit by bit. But they're coming, and when they come—well, they'll clinch the business, there's no doubt. They've got everything that will be needed when we run short. Lizzie has been telling me that rationing has begun."

"Oh, yes; and every day we find ourselves a little shorter of something."

"A good thing, too. We all eat too much. But you look as if you'd been rationing all the time I've been away."

Beatrice shook her head.

"No, no, living on the fat of the land, and thinking far too much about my own likes and dislikes. It's time I went to the war, too, and I'm going now you're back."

"So that's in the wind, is it? How's business? Not that I'm in desperation to hear about it. You can live on very little out there on the farm where my folk are. It's a grand life, and I think I'll go there and end up when we're through with this. I went into housework again, fed chickens and pigs and slept the kind of sleep I never

got here worrying over Mrs. So-and-so's frocks and hats."

Beatrice smiled.

"They're difficult, aren't they, madame?—and the more impossible they are, judged from our standpoint, the more difficult they are. I'm afraid I've learned to despise my sex here."

"No, no!" cried Madame Theodore, with her hearty human laugh. "That's no good. You don't get anywhere despising people, only farther and farther away. The psychology of clothes is part of the big human scheme of things. It all has a part. Are you satisfied on the whole with your business year?"

"It'll soon be two years since you went away," Beatrice reminded her. "Yes, I'm satisfied so far as the money part is concerned, but—but, well, I don't know——"

"What do you not know?" inquired Madame Theodore in her most judicial voice.

"I think I've been on the wrong lines, thinking too much about myself; what I should do or should not do. I've forgotten how to live."

Madame Theodore sat back studying the fine, clear-cut face before her with an intentness which betrayed her deep interest.

"Something's happened to her," she said to herself. "I wonder what?" Aloud she said quietly, "To live, of course, is the thing, and after all life as originally planned by the Creator was an elemental thing. We've complicated it, my dear, loaded it up with trimmings, the most of them unnecessary and disastrous in their effect. Here in this business I've pandered to it, made money out of the weakness of my kind."

"Oh, but," cried Beatrice, quick to defend, "I wouldn't go so far as that. If you hadn't others would, and you always gave good value for their money. I've tried to remember that, while I've been alone, and there have been very few complaints."

The more experienced woman smiled faintly, observing that Beatrice evaded the issue.

"That's not the point. Over there in the American

backwoods I've come up with elemental things again, my dear, with what the books call plain living and high thinking. I've seen young things grow and blossom and the arid ground coaxed to give her treasures. It's grand. It's nature, Beatrice, and through it folk will get back to the God they've lost, or are in danger of losing."

"America has made you a poet," said Beatrice with a little wondering smile. "But there are sordid elements there, too, unless we have been fed on lies here."

Madame Theodore's shrewd old lips tightened.

"Yes, there are sordid things, many of them of a depth of sordidness greater than we touch here. You see, it's a young country, and the young live intensely, doing right or wrong with all their might. When they've been through the mill they'll be better folk. Let's leave it at that. Now tell me what you have at the back of your mind. I see quite a lot in your eyes already."

Beatrice heaved a prodigious sigh.

"I want to get away."

"Tell me something I don't know. I guessed that when I was out there."

"From my letters? I thought I had tried to keep it out."

"Partly from your letters, and partly from the queer sense you and I spoke about together long ago. Have you any plans?"

Kneeling on the hearthrug still, her face glowing a little with the reflection from it, Beatrice told what was in her mind.

"Linnorie! And so you go back to begin again! How wonderful it all is. Ah, lassie, the One above all makes no mistakes with any of us."

Beatrice's eyes grew round with wonder.

"Explain what you mean, dear madame. Though I go out there it is only temporary, just to help a little. Monica Brodie said a wonderful thing before she left this afternoon, that through suffering and ministry to it, Linnorie would be purged of the shadow which has rested on it."

"That may be, but you are going back to Linnorie for

good, nothing will ever put me past that. Now tell me about your poor sister."

They sat talking till near midnight, but it was not too late for Beatrice to write a brief note to Monica and run out with it to the pillar box which was only a few yards from the door. She slept that night soundly for the first time for weeks, feeling rested, refreshed, and a singular aloofness from the cares and problems which had beset her of late. In her heart she had recovered something of the faith of which Alison had spoken, and was comforted by the assurance that some great, strong beneficent force had undertaken for her.

A week later she stood ready in the little salon to say good-bye to her old friend, who had slipped into her former place with wonderful adroitness, explaining to questioning customers and friends that she had had the most wonderful holiday in the world, and had come back to let the one who had made that holiday possible take up war work. Beatrice made no attempt to hide her emotion as she stepped into the little salon, gloves in hand, to say good-bye.

"If I live to be an old, old woman, Madame Theodore, I never shall forget what you have done and been to me! You stood by me when I was in despair. You opened a big, hopeful, friendly door. You restored my self-respect and gave me what is the most insistent need of every human being, I am sure, the chance to work."

Theodora Duncan put her hands with mock modesty over her ears.

"Wheesht, my dear, one thing at a time! Don't forget it was a convenience to me, too, for I never could have got out to see my folk in the back blocks of Montana if you hadn't come here when you did."

"You would have sold the goodwill of your business, because you had told me before I needed you that you were thinking of it. No, no, madame, that won't do. There is a mountain of gratitude which will never lessen in my heart, and the most wonderful thing about it is that I don't mind it. But my day will come!"

"Aye, will it too," said the shrewd, kindly old business

woman with a twinkle in her eye. "I'm not without hopes yet of getting my wee bit cot hoose in Linnorie woods yet. Away ye go, and not hae me greeting at my time of life, when we need all the smiles we can muster."

On the day Beatrice went out to Marriston Monica was waiting at the Junction with the pony cart, and the luggage was left to come up later.

Their greeting was affectionate, Monica made no attempt to hide her joy.

"Mother is just delighted. She says it has removed the last stumbling block from her path. The marriage is on Wednesday, and they are sailing for New York on Friday. So you have four days to learn your job as the Tommies say."

"Do you think I shall be fit for it?" asked Beatrice, with a slight shrinking. "I know a good deal about housekeeping, of course, as every sensible girl does, but it has been on a small scale."

"It doesn't make much difference, just a question of the multiplication table. I assure you I'm not troubling myself, though Sister thinks we are rather a youthful crowd to run such a big place. But I just laugh and say it is youth's day, and to wait till she has seen you. You have all the dignity necessary and will give us the tone we need, so mind you justify *that*."

It was impossible not to be affected by Monica's gay and happy tone, and Beatrice's eyes as they roamed over the fresh greenness of the Linnorie woods, which reached right down to the edge of the railway line behind, were filled with a soft gladness.

"I promised Mrs. Meldrum we should stop at the inn so that she could get what she calls a shake of your hand," said Monica, guiding the pony's head away from, rather than towards, the gates. "You've no idea what a stand-by she has been. She was positively thrilled when she heard you were coming. Ah, there she is looking out for us."

"Let me down a minute, will you, dear, I just want to say something to her?"

"Right-o."

The pony was drawn up, Beatrice leaped out, and met

Mrs. Meldrum under the shade of the tree by the old draw-well.

"Weel, if this is no a sicht for sair een," said the good soul, clasping her hand warmly. "When Miss Brodie telt me ye were comin' I couldna believe it. Eh, but ye never cam oot efter a your fine promises, and your bed was never sleepit in till I took some o' the laddies in that wanted a country week-end when they got their leave. Hoos a wi ye? You're aulder, my dear. It's the country air you're needin'."

"I'll get well here, Mrs. Meldrum, and it's the work I've been longing for."

"An' you've gien up the dressmakin' for guid?" pursued Mrs. Meldrum, with a grudging note in her voice.

Beatrice laughed, understanding perfectly what was at the back of her mind. To her it was at once incomprehensible and unsuitable for a Heron to be engaged in such occupation; she was for the betterment of working folks, but when in her inn-parlour she heard them discussing the coming democracy she was not afraid to butt in with reservations.

"There's ay been laird an' leddy and the common folk, and whaur would ye find a better or a bonnier or a happier place than Marriston under the auld Herons? Awa wi' your havers. Ye mak' me tired."

Beatrice had difficulty in getting away from her, and only managed it on a promise to run down as often as she could.

"She has a guileful tongue, Monica, but one forgives everything because she is so genuine and so good!"

"She has no use for us," said Monica, with a little twist of her pretty mouth. "It is only just lately, since we took the boys in, she has owned that we are fit to live."

Beatrice laughed again, and then her eyes grew grave as the pony's head was turned in at the gates of Linnorie. Up the short but winding avenue they drove in complete silence, and suddenly the old, grey front of the house broke upon her vision. The door was open, and a lad in blue, leaning on a crutch, stood against the lintel

enjoying the warm sunshine. It drew Beatrice up sharply, brought her to realisation of the new Linnorie and her part in its administration.

In her inmost heart, as she touched Monica's unoccupied hand with a queer convulsive grip, surged unutterable things. But one stood out. She had come home !

CHAPTER XXX

SHE was a success from the start. Her two business years had developed her administrative ability, and her heart was now completely in her work.

Very, very slowly the immanence of suffering, the insistent and ever-present call for its assuagement, and, above all, the warm human element which had been lacking in her business life compensated her at every turn for the intimate horror of war from which her whole being shrank. She revolted at times against the strange obsession which set men at one another's throats to settle differences with which they had naught to do.

As time went on her hatred and horror of war became a passion, like her desire to atone for her father's dereliction. This time, however, the eyes of her soul were opened, so that she saw herself clearly. There was something merciless in her study and analysis of herself. She admitted frankly in the recesses of that soul to which she had found the key that much of the discontent as well as the effort of the past had been based on pride of name and race, pride of personal things, coupled with secret anger, because her family had fallen on such evil times. Alison Grier, now left to battle with a bereft parish, while her husband got his spell on the fighting front, making the best of inadequate pulpit supply Sunday after Sunday, keeping the home fires burning with just a little less than her customary cheer, had no idea how her little sermon preached from the kerb that night in spring had become the litany of her friend's life. They did not meet often now, nor yet write, but no cloud dimmed their affection. One day Beatrice would tell her all perhaps, but with some nature's experience moves slowly, and expression tarries.

Beatrice loved Monica also, because that pure idealistic

happy little soul, with mind and heart crystal clear, won love as easily as she breathed. Havoc was duly wrought among sundry susceptible boys in blue, but Monica smiled through all, absolutely refusing to take them seriously, and assuming towards them a delightful motherly love which disarmed, while it filled the more ardent with despair. Nothing surprised Beatrice Heron in her new life more than the gradual change in her thoughts concerning John Brodie. The fear of meeting him, the possibility of his sudden return any day and the effect it might have on her, passed from her as a tale that is told. True, the chances of his return were shadowy, because his knowledge of the East had caused him to be sent to a very distant part of the war zone from which there were no short leaves. So the testing months went by, while all the foundations of life continued to be shaken, and the forces of darkness seemed to be working their will with human affairs.

There were days when the mystery and the anguish of it all seemed greater than Beatrice could bear. It was so with her on a sad day in the early autumn, a year after she had come to Linnorie, as she made her way across the park to the little burying ground behind the yew hedges where her father and mother slept with their fathers. Time and again it had been both refuge and sanctuary for her. When she could bear no more the sight of human pain, she fled to the spot where brooded the great peace. Those who slept under the soft green sward had solved the immutable mystery; knew now the why and the wherefore of all.

Often, too, she had such a close, warm, comforted feeling there, that she could almost believe that those she had humanly loved were now ministers of His to do His pleasure upon the earth. And surely part of that pleasure in these times of agony and stress must be the assuagement of grief and pain, and the passionate, never-sleeping anxiety of the world. She was specially discouraged that weary day, for a new convoy of sadly wounded men had arrived by the morning train, and the news from the war zone was bad, seeming to point to possible defeat.

She knelt down by the graves, picked some dead leaves from the shrubs and plants, and then, still kneeling, folded her hands in the attitude of prayer. It was no longer for herself or selfish ends she prayed, but for the whole world groaning and travailing, for the fathers and mothers who had lost their sons, the sisters who mourned their brothers, the maids whose lovers had gone down in their flower, and who would never now be wives. For Wally she prayed, and Donald and Jimmy Grier, and, finally, for John Brodie. His last letter had informed Monica that she must not expect to hear for some time, as they were going forward out of the reach of mail either for dispatch or receipt.

She had no idea what time had passed, all she knew that the comfort for which she asked descended. She picked a little sprig of rosemary for remembrance from the bush between the graves, and put it against her lips as she moved away. And as she stepped back to the walk between the yew hedges, she saw a man standing waiting, a figure in uniform, whose name she did not need to ask. John Brodie had come back !

She walked to him steadily, noting with a clearness of vision that had both passion and all the yearning of a woman's heart in it that he was greatly changed. Either he had been ill, or wounded, or badly fed. He had lost some of his fine presence, his great height seemed to accentuate his leanness. But his kind, grave smile was as of yore, as his hands clasped hers.

" Monica told me I might find you here. Do I intrude ? "

" Oh no. I was praying for you over there. This is my sanctuary. Without it I could not get through some of the days. When did you come ? "

" This afternoon. I landed only last night at Southampton."

" And what has happened ? "

" I had a slight wound ; it is nothing ; it is nearly healed. But the bit of work I told my sister about in the last letter took longer and was a bit more arduous than we expected. After I put it through I had a sort of stupid collapse, and the M.O. ordered me home for some

months. He explained at great length that I would crock up definitely and probably entirely if I did not call a halt now. Anyway they gave me no choice."

"The expedition was successful, I take it, and the price your health?" she said abruptly, sensing easily that the thing he was making light of was probably something of far greater importance than they might ever know. Certainly they would not hear from him.

"Yes, its chief recommendation was that it conserved life, lots of life, five thousand men in fact."

Beatrice stood still in the path and looked at him squarely.

"It was your idea I am sure, and I should not be at all surprised if you carried it through single-handed."

"Not quite. I had a handful of the best fellows the sun ever rose or set on, and a batman from Edinburgh no less, who inspired the whole company. He was a waiter in one of the hotels here. God send he may live to come back and find a better job. We didn't lose one of them."

"Would it be too much if I asked the nature of the expedition?"

"It was to find a secret route which enabled us to cut off the Turks, that was all; but don't let us talk about the war."

"There isn't anything else," said Beatrice, her grave voice slightly vibrant with passion. "How is one to get away from it? Do you like to find your home full of its most ghastly evidence?"

Brodie did not answer. They began to move away from the shade of the yew hedges out into the pale sunlight which was veering rapidly towards the rim of the western sky.

"Don't go back yet," said Brodie when she would have headed directly for the front of the house. She cast on him a slightly startled glance, then something mute in her eyes indicated that she would follow his lead.

They turned their faces westward towards the thick belt of wood which clustered about the base of the hill and gave the house such adequate and beautiful shelter.

"It is two years and a half since I walked in the woods

before; Linnorie woods in spring was one of the visions that tormented men like me in the desert," said Brodie.

"They are beautiful even now," Beatrice answered softly. "Look at that flame of the beech beside the sombre yews. There is no colouring like nature's, yet, when men paint it as they see it, the world calls them mad."

"The world has labels for the inner sense, but a few labels never hurt either a person or a cause," he observed in a musing voice.

"You think not?" she asked wistfully. "There is such a lot of foolish talk in the world. Sometimes it is worse than foolish, and has an edge of spite."

"That is so, but it can't affect the ultimate issue."

"It can hinder it though," Beatrice asserted. "It kept America out of the war, and in individual lives I have often seen its effect."

"And suffered from it?" he asked gently compelling, imagining some bitterness in her voice.

"Only a little. What I am afraid of," she added with a little shiver, "is that I have made others suffer."

"Never willingly," he hastened to assure her. "We all make mistakes. That is human. It is the way we handle our mistakes that proves the mettle of the pasture."

She listened with a quickened breathing and after a moment, as the shadows of the wood were about to enfold them, she said:

"I have been taking care of the people you were interested in. One of the old Miss Kinlochs is dead. The other seems to have grown younger with the war. She is taking care of a hostel for girl munitioners. Could you believe it?"

"I could believe anything you tell me," he said involuntarily.

"I made a point of visiting them every week on a certain day. They got to look for it, but I think I ought to tell you that though they were very glad to see me, they never failed to convey that I was only a substitute for you."

Brodie laughed at that, and she, answering to his amusement, smiled too.

"Sometimes it hurt my pride, and that was a good thing," she said, and proceeded to tell him about the other victims of the Trust towards whom she had felt a personal responsibility.

"Of course, I always knew you were doing this, though I had no written or personal proof," he said suddenly.

"Did you? But how could you know it?"

"Because you said you would, and that with some is enough. A word is as good as a thousand bonds."

"Great was your faith, and I don't know how or where you justified it," she said, and then had to pass in front of him on the narrow path strewn inches deep in pine needles, which brought them to the little bridge crossing the Linnorie water. It was rather dry now, for there had not been much rain; even the Lammas floods had been of the most meagre description. A low parapet, lichen-covered, protected the sides, and somehow they paused there and Beatrice sat down on it. The shafts of golden light still lingering in the west penetrated in places through the thick shades of the wood, casting an indescribable and soft radiance about them. The silence was profound, broken only by the soft cooing of a wood pigeon somewhere in the thicket. Beatrice had no desire to break that silence, nor was she in the least self-conscious, though she knew that irrevocable words were coming, and that her heart was waiting for them, a chamber swept and garnished for their music.

"If you knew what it is for me to find you here," he said at last. "The nearer I came to home the more my heart seemed to be at rest. It was because you were here, and I not knowing it, except like that."

Suddenly she lifted her large eyes to his face and spoke impetuously.

"If you feel like that, why did you not reply to the little, humble letter I sent to you before you left Scotland last time?"

"I got no letter," he answered steadily. "I hoped for it to the last, but none came."

"I wrote and posted it with my own hand," she said, "and then was ashamed, thinking I had cheapened myself."

"That would be impossible. Can I hear what was in it?"

"Oh yes, word for word. They are seared on my brain. But I wonder why it never reached you?"

She paused breathless, and then as he waited spoke the written words which through some mysterious cause had failed to reach their destination. They would never learn the cause, other lives have been influenced for good or ill by just such happenings, some failure in the system of distribution, or some carelessness on the part of some official.

"Thank you," he said quietly. "I wish I'd got it. It would have taken the edge off some unspeakably dreary days for me. But it could not have affected the main issue. Something kept telling me that, so often and so persistently, that at last only peace was left. Do you remember the day we first met in the French salon at George Street?"

Did she remember? Not yet would she tell him how every word, and look, every vibration of the atmosphere were registered for ever in her heart. When she did not answer he continued:

"Well, I knew that day that nothing could separate us, even death. And now you are here, and if it means anything at all, it means that you are mine."

She put up her hand involuntarily to stay the flood which rose to her face, the glory to her eyes. But because her nature was large and generous, she would give royally, without a question or a doubt. So she rose and looked at him very steadily.

"I have fought against it. Yes, I knew that day, too, that something different from everything else had come into my life, but I wanted to keep you outside. You see, I had taken a sort of vow against your name."

"I guessed that, but some vows are made to be broken, and the curse causeless shall not come," he answered with a curious lightening of the voice.

"I want to tell you," she said with hand uplifted as if to ward him off for a moment longer, "every prop has been taken. I've been left like the last leaf on the tree, and in the desolate days I kept turning to you. I would

have given everything to reach you, yet the pride of which I spoke, and which has been my curse, would not let me, but it is all gone—not an atom left.”

Then she flashed on him an adorable look which brought the youth to her face and lent it an indescribable beauty.

“ I’m getting old—twenty-eight, and I’ve never had a lover. All that I have is yours. It is very little, but——”

Her voice broke there, and she was folded to his heart, the silence unbroken in the moment of rare and very perfect happiness, even by the wood pigeon in the thicket.

* * * * *

“ Do you think the war will last long ? ” she asked after a time when they could bring their thoughts back to impersonal things.

“ At least two years more,” he answered without the slightest hesitation.

She shivered against the close clasp of his arm.

“ Two years more of blood, and tears, and fear, and all the horrors which attend on base passions. But surely not ! What will the world be like, and shall we have any young men left ? ”

“ This generation will suffer, but the price has to be paid,” he said.

“ And will you go out again ? ”

“ Why yes, of course, the moment I am permitted. Now I have my heart’s desire I shall get well in double-quick time. Happiness is the finest medicine in the world.”

“ But what about me ? How shall I bear it ? ”

“ You would bear it less if I stood back in the slacker’s shoes, my darling. I can see the swift scorn gathering in your eyes at the thought.”

“ Oh, that could never happen, but—but how shall I bear it ? You have been away so long.”

He turned her face to his and looked into the depths of her eyes from which all the pride and the aloofness had departed, leaving them clear mirrors of a woman’s loving heart.

“ You will marry me before I go back ? ”

"Shall I?" Her voice dropped to a whisper almost awe-stricken in its intensity.

"Yes, and so Linnorie will come back where it belongs. My mother made a will, before she married, and the place is mine absolutely. When we get through with this big fight, you and I will make good all the waste which brought us together first. All we shall keep for ourselves will be the old house, a few acres of the park, and this strip of wood for ever hallowed now."

"Isn't it wonderful?" she said, hiding her face on his shoulder. "And the most wonderful thing of all is that there is no Beatrice Heron any more."

"What do I see, then?" he asked whimsically. "She is thinner and more tired than she ought to be, but still, thank God, a very substantial woman."

"Something in her has died. It is the true perspective that is standing out. Life is different, shorn of its trappings, the things I used to think were the indispensables and which I know now are the dust beneath my feet."

"There is only one thing that matters, and that is love," he said. "For lack of it men are at one another's throats, and the world is perishing to-day. We will make an end of war, Beatrice. We shall dedicate our lives to that."

She was with him wholly and her whole being thrilled at the fineness of her lover, his brave manliness, his indomitable courage that had taken him forth on many a forlorn hope, and his unflinching attitude towards the great verities. How mean and paltry seemed her poor conception of life; her struggle to uphold the shreds of dignity she imagined essential to the name she bore! She had come down into the valley, indeed, and not only found love there, but all the precious things of life, beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. She rose unsteadily, her eyes swimming in tears.

"I want to go back," she said, pointing across the park in the direction whence they had come. "I want to tell them over yonder. No, please don't come, I need to be alone."

"Tell me first that you love me," he asked jealously. "I have been very patient. I never have asked."

She hesitated a moment, then putting her hands on his shoulders gave herself royally.

"I love you. I have no life apart from you. I will marry you when and where you like, and be true to you to the day of my death, loving and serving you so long as we are permitted to be together."

She ran from him with that, and he made no attempt to follow her. Too well he had proven that there are times when the prime need of the soul is solitude, that for its health it has to withdraw itself from commerce with others. It is because so many destroy this vast longing that there is so much noise in the world.

He turned towards the house, pondering on the glory of life, and that whether it should be long or short for him, he would have tasted of its sweetest cup. He was happy with a happiness which is rare. His love affair had been short and strange, the woman who had just pledged herself so solemnly to him, he had only met three times. How comes it that in some rare cases such complete assurance is possible, that soul answers to soul without question or doubt. Who can answer these things? They are part of the riddle of the universe.

The warp and woof of life are woven of threads both gold and grey, sometimes they are black.

As Brodie crossed to the drive, he encountered a telegraph boy on a red post office bicycle, and stretched out his hand for the missive. It was addressed to Beatrice, and when he opened it discovered a war office message informing her that her brother, Walter Caverhill Heron, had been killed at La Basseè three days before.

CHAPTER XXXI

IN a London hotel, for a whole week, Beatrice had awaited the arrival of a boat from the East. While her daily visit to the office of the steamship company elicited very little information beyond the fact that the ship was on the way, the evident assurance and complete lack of anxiety displayed there did not entirely remove her apprehension. For two long years she had waited for this day, and hope deferred maketh the heart sick.

Even the busy heart, and in all that time Beatrice had had her hands full at Linnorie, full with the waste and wreckage of war.

But now the hospital had been closed for a month, Linnorie was being swept and garnished for its master, and she was waiting in the same hotel in Dover Street which had housed them when they came on their wedding journey, and to say good-bye.

She lived over and over again these precious hours and days in a singular isolation which was in no sense loneliness. There were people in London she could have called to her assistance, several hospitable doors would have opened wide to receive her, but she did not feel the need of them. In her heart dwelt one image only, which coloured all her thoughts, companioning her in waking and sleeping hours ; warp and woof alike of her conscious life and of her dreams.

When a woman like Beatrice Heron, who has not scattered the largesse of her nature abroad, concentrates on one affection or object, then it is what may be called one of the great loves, which are rare in this world, and would require a separate chronicle.

After two months' leave only, John Brodie had returned to his regiment and duty in the East, where he had been swallowed as aforetime, letters and parcels reaching him

only in strange spasms somewhat resembling a flood and a long drought. To many exiles the drought was continuous. On these far-flung battle lines, where there were no short leaves, where mailcarriers failed and marauders abounded, our soldiers suffered more than we dare to think from drought, both of body and of soul.

Beatrice had received a good many letters from him, which she wore in a wallet near her heart, deeming them more precious than jewels.

Who can estimate the height and the depth of love ?

Many waters cannot quench it, nor yet the floods drown it.

" Love is life's end, an end, but never ending,
Love is life's wealth, ne'er spent, but ever spending,
Love life's reward, rewarded in rewarding."

* * * * *

The condition men called peace had been in existence for nearly eight months, and for the first time Beatrice beheld the miracle of spring in London.

There is none quite like it in the world.

It comes so rapidly, with such unimagined beauty that through sharp contrast with its teeming life, it strikes all the senses with passionate and common appeal. During these May days of incomparable loveliness, Beatrice tasted of the lure of London, lived in her parks and squares and streets, studying the faces of the people, trying to arrive at some just estimate of her throbbing heart.

What struck her most perhaps was the apparent slughtness of the scar left by the great cataclysm in human feelings and affairs. In comparison, Scotland was very sad. Bereft of so great a proportion of her sons, she was like Rachel mourning for her children, refusing to be comforted. Beatrice had part and lot in that great mourning since Wally, the hope of the Herons, had gone down in his young prime, and his dear dust slept with others in that sombre immortal region which will go down to history and posterity as the Somme.

After the first intolerable wrench and blow, Beatrice had become strangely reconciled to Wally's early call to

the other side ; nor had she any conscious feeling that his active life was over. Somewhere, somehow, that gallant host was carrying on.

The effect of joy and sorrow on different natures differs essentially. But it may be taken as a common verdict that happiness is a builder up of faith. Sorrow shatters it. In natures which have any claim to fineness a singular gratitude, a sense of unworthiness, walks ever side by side with joy. It was so with Beatrice. She had had very little happiness in her life, until she met John Brodie. Rather it may be described as a series of shocks, administered at regular intervals from the time she was able to think seriously and to grasp the facts of existence.

So she took her happiness when it came shrinkingly, clinging to it with a pathetic wistfulness, as one who had scarcely expected or deserved it. But she had prayed—oh ! how she had prayed !—that no evil might befall her husband and king ; that he might be spared to come back to her. Yet while she prayed, she had no argument to support the special providence she desired.

Others had loved as dearly and were bereft.

She could not look at the many tokens of widowhood in the streets, some of them worn by women so young that they looked like mere children, without a pang.

As the days lengthened into the second week she began to experience a strange restlessness commingled with fear.

She walked one day so many miles that she had tired herself out and had fallen asleep, about five of the afternoon, in the little sitting-room she had been extravagant enough to retake for herself because it was the one they had shared in the last days before she had stood to watch the train going out from Waterloo, after which the great darkness fell again. She dreamed as she lay there of a great river flowing darkly before her eager eyes, her trembling feet touching its very brim. On the other side, in a light which never was on sea or land, she saw them walking, a great host, divided only by the narrow tide which flowed so swiftly that it made an impassable barrier. Her subconscious thoughts coloured

her vision and in her dreams she seemed to know that John had passed over also, and that she had heard the trumpets sounding for him on the other side.

She stirred uneasily, conscious of some disturbing sound, and when she opened her eyes he was kneeling by her side.

Her cry rang through the room. Scarcely awake, she imagined that all was over. But the clasp of his arms was real ; his dear cheek, worn and brown, was against hers ; she could feel his tears.

And for a long time nothing was said ; they clung together like two children who, frightened in the dark, had suddenly come out into the full light.

"How did you know to come here, darling ?" she asked at length. "Did you get my wireless ?"

He nodded.

"Got it three days ago. We've been held up with every obstacle known to human ingenuity ; we've been in perils by sea and land in this precious peace of ours," he said with a wry face. "But never mind ! Here we are ! It was like you to think of this, the very sitting-room we had, the heaven I've been thinking of and waiting for since I saw it last."

"Not the real heaven," she said shyly. "That's at home. Linnorie woods in spring ! John, you'll see them this time ! I've been praying spring wouldn't be over, but of course she's later than in this wonderful city. Our hospital was closed a month ago."

"Tell me everything," he said hungrily. "Every single thing. Remember, I haven't seen a letter for over five months."

"Oh, but John, they were written, every week—sometimes two of them."

"I know, my darling, but they never reached this poor wretch. Something was wrong and rotten with the postal system, and the long silences embittered some of the chaps beyond endurance."

"I wonder who has got them, what eyes will read them, John ?" she said, and her colour rose a little, for she had poured her heart out on those pages, often writing them in the hushed stillness of the night, when her

household slept, and it hurt to think what alien and perhaps desecrating eyes might have read her impassioned words.

"That doesn't matter, dear; the only thing that matters is that I didn't get them, and that you had written them, and nothing matters now at all! But tell me about Linnorie and everything you have been doing, but more especially all about yourself."

"We were demobilised in March, but it was nearly the end of April before we closed the doors."

"And how is Monica?"

"Monica has gone to live with the Griers for two weeks because Jimmy is there," said Beatrice, and the laughter gathered in her eyes.

Brodie smiled too, understanding that she was poking fun at him, for he had scouted the idea that Jimmy Grier and his sister might make a match, of which fact Beatrice had been assured since the day she had seen them meet in the little white-and-gold salon in George Street.

"They've pulled it off then, as you said they would?"

Beatrice nodded.

"Jimmy came back only in March, and now he's got to find a practice or a post of some kind. I don't think it will be difficult," she added with a little, happy smile. "He is covered with decorations, and a grateful country surely will see that he gets his chance."

When Brodie did not answer she put a wifely hand on his breast.

"What are *you* going to get, dearest?"

Brodie shook his head.

"I have all I want here, and we who are left have got something else to do than bother our heads about decorations. What I'm keen on is getting demobilised as quickly as possible, so it's the War Office for me and you to-morrow morning."

"And after you are demobilised?" Beatrice's eyes were wide with questioning in which, however, there was not a shadow of doubt. "Shall we go on living at Linnorie?"

"No, darling. I would like to go back to the Straits Settlements as soon as I can. Will you come?"

Would she come? A little breathless sigh of content was his answer.

"Come! Do you think I'm to lose you again, John; and, besides, I want to see how you lived and moved and had your being out there. I'm jealous of every bit of experience I could not share with you. No man will ever understand just how women have felt about the war."

"Won't they?" Brodie's interest in the latter part of her speech seemed slightly detached. He was thinking of the long, dull days in the bungalow on the island, of the fears and hopes and despairs which had chased themselves through his mind and heart, of the dreams he had dreamed, and the castles he had built.

"What is it, John?"

"I'm only thinking of what it will be like going back there with you and to have you there always. My God, what home can be to a man who has not had a real one for so long!"

She nestled to him again, and her eyes grew soft and radiant with the inner joy which seemed almost too great to be borne.

"But we will remember the goal, John," she said softly. "We'll live very simply and save what we can and pay off to the uttermost farthing. Happiness must never make us selfish."

"That is so, my darling. We'll try to take care of that."

"And then we shall come home some time and Linnorie will be ours, the house of our dreams come true; and we shall have dear old Madame in the wee Heronry, and Jimmy and Monica will come, and—and——"

She said no more, but hid her face. And he held her close, understanding what other vision passed before her—the vision of little children playing on the lawns at Linnorie, roaming the woods and the daisied fields together, clasping their little hands in love, restoring the old joy, the imperishable traditions of the race.

They looked at life whole; they were ready to quaff

the cup, bitter or sweet, as it was ordained, and to give of their best.

And when life is thus faced manfully, lifted to the right plane, why then it is a glorious heritage, which the world can neither give nor take away.

* * * * *

They came home to Linnorie in the warm, sweet sunshine of the summer afternoon, having taken the journey in sections, not caring where they tarried or how they broke it so long as they were together.

They left all their traps at Marriston station and came by way of the fields to Linnorie. When they emerged from the shadow of the tall trees behind the house they saw something on the broad stretch of green sward before the long back windows which gripped Beatrice's heart.

It was a little toddling child pulling a skin horse on wheels, a child with a pink-and-white face and a great shock of flaxen hair standing round his head like an aureole. He wore a little suit of blue linen, the colour of his eyes, and appeared very much at home.

"It's a baby, John; whose can it be?" cried Beatrice, gripping his arm and then bounding forward in her excitement. Before he could say anything her question was answered. Through the French window of the library stepped a short, slight figure in black, bareheaded, with a wistfulness on a face which nature had intended for sunshine and summer air.

"It's Ida!" cried Beatrice, and ran from him and gathered her sister to her heart. Brodie turned away and walked after the child with whom he did not have much difficulty in making friends. When he looked round the sisters had disappeared into the house. Both were crying, and for a few moments coherent speech was difficult, almost impossible.

"How did you come, and from where, dear?" asked Beatrice at last. Then she touched her sister's black sleeve, her eyes asking a mute question.

"Oh yes, Gustav is killed, so is Conrad, and Friedrich, and all the Weiles excepting two or three quite elderly

ones who don't count. It was from the women I ran away."

"The women?" repeated Beatrice vaguely. "What women?"

"The German women. Gustav's mother, and sisters, and aunts, and cousins. Millions of them back there in Rhenish Prussia. I've brought my baby to Scotland to bring him up Scotch, and I'll change his name and never let him know he had a German father."

"But why, darling? Was he then unkind to you?"

"Oh no, never, but—but it is the kind of people they are, and I'm so ashamed and miserable. They would bring him up to hate Britain, and teach him to be ready to fight in the new war which they have begun to talk about already. They hate us, Bee, with an awful and deadly hatred, and the women are the worst. I saved up every penny I could lay my hands on, and then, when I was on a visit to one of the aunts at Hamburg, I wandered down to the quay one day and got talking to the captain of a Leith cargo boat and he took us over. He gave us up his own cabin, and I'll never forget his kindness as long as I live. His name is Craig, and he is the master of a ship called the *Pelican*."

"How did you know to come here? I suppose Lotta told you?"

Ida shook her head.

"I didn't go near Lotta. She had too many German friends. I went straight up to Madame Theodore's seeking you, and when I found out all that had happened here and that Lizzie Henderson was one of your maids, I made bold to come out. I didn't do wrong, did I?"

"No, no," said Beatrice, and her voice was choked with emotion.

"I expected to find Monica Brodie here, but Lizzie said she had gone on a visit to the Griers. Why did she do that, Bee. Are they very intimate?"

Beatrice answered without a moment's hesitation.

"She is going to marry Jimmy."

Something indefinable and rather poignant flitted across Ida's face.

"Oh! I suppose he went to the war?"

"Why, of course, immediately, and he has won I think everything he possibly could win. We've lost Wally, Ida. Did Lizzie tell you that?"

Ida shook her head.

"Lost Wally? How?"

"He came home from New Zealand to join up. He was in the Royal Scots, and was killed at La Basseè in 1917."

"He came home and was killed at La Basseè," repeated Ida in a low, vibrant voice. "But how extraordinary. Of course, I forget that I've been away nearly six years. Bee, you haven't changed a bit excepting to grow younger, and quite beautiful. I expect it is happiness. And so you are John Brodie's wife?"

"I am, thank God," said Beatrice out of the fullness of her heart.

"You don't look a bit the same. Look at me! I'm three years younger than you, but see my grey hairs. That was Germany, and what I've been through. They fed me on lies. They told me Edinburgh had been sacked and burned, and that the Forth Bridge had been blown up, and all the Forth defences demolished. That was the stuff the German people were fed on, too, and even now they think the war ended by mutual consent, and when the troops came back they received them like conquerors."

"I'm glad they did, poor boys; they deserved that poor recompense," said Beatrice, and in her eyes were soft depths of infinite compassion.

"I'm sorry for some sections of them," said Ida. "Of course there are decent ones in Germany same as here. But—but I want to be cut off and to cut off Walter."

"Did they let you call him Walter?" asked Beatrice, in amazement.

"His German name is Otho, but he *shall* be Walter—his surname I haven't decided yet. Could it be Heron, do you think, Beatrice? Is there any law against my giving my son my own name?"

"No law, but we'll talk all this over again, my dear. Meanwhile, all that matters is that you are here safely. Now I must go and see your little son."

"And John won't mind if I stay here for a while?"

Beatrice smiled.

"John Brodie will make you so welcome you'll think it is your own, Ida; that is the kind of man John Brodie is. He lives to help lame dogs over stiles."

"Well, I'm a very lame one, so perhaps he'll enjoy helping me. He looks so big and strong. He will keep them away, won't he, and not let them take Walter, even if they find out where I am?"

A note of wildness crept into her voice; she laid her fingers almost convulsively on her sister's arm.

"He is very wise and strong, Ida, and very good," she answered with a high confident note in her voice. "Be sure he will stand by you. But I don't think you need fear that they will rush over here to take your little son from you. Why should they?"

"Oh, because they are like that!" cried Ida feverishly. "They think Germany is the only country in the world, and that all others should bow down before them. I never should have got away from that prison, Bee, if I hadn't run away. The German doctor, a quite decent man who had been through the whole of the war and lost everything he possessed, helped me. He said the child needed a change from Aarenburg; that it was absolutely necessary to get both him and me away for a time. So we were transferred from one system of surveillance to another. But, of course, it was easier in Hamburg. But I had no money, Bee, and I still owe the captain of the *Pelican* for my passage."

"Come and tell John," said Beatrice pitifully, her heart a strange medley of conflicting emotions.

"Is this the peace, John?" she asked later when they were in the shelter of their own room. "Do you think that things will ever come right? That this frightful orgy of hate and murder and black revenge will ever be swept off the earth?"

"In time," John answered in his calm, untroubled voice, "the lees will sink to the bottom and the waters become clear again. Meanwhile our job is not to stand by doing nothing; but to be active in trying to bring about a better state of things."

"But surely you sympathise with poor Ida's desire and determination to keep her son and bring him up here."

"As his father is dead, she is right. But perhaps the day will come when she will feel differently. Apparently Weile was kind to her. She has nothing to say against him."

Beatrice shivered, recalling the personality of the man, and some of the things her sister had told her.

"It seems an awful thing to say, but I can't help feeling thankful that he is not alive to complicate things. But she has no money. I hadn't thought of that. She even owes her passage to that kind Captain Craig who helped her away."

"That won't matter, my dear. Surely we can share what we have with these poor waifs. There is nothing to hinder her staying here while we are abroad. I don't think for a moment the Weiles will seek her here. It is not as if the boy's father was alive."

"So there will be another Walter Heron growing up in Linnorie—little waif, half German, half Scotch. I wonder whether Ida will be strong enough to eradicate what she calls the German taint in him?"

"Some of that bitterness will pass, darling. It must pass if the world's hurt is to be healed. Everything is in the child's hands in these days. He is omnipotent, ever since the Master Himself called him and set him in the midst."

These words, so true, so prophetic, stilled the confusion and the tumult in Beatrice's heart. As she turned away to be busy about her toilet, her mind was full of strange thoughts, of the mystery of life and death, the mutability of human affairs, but, above all, the unchanging and blessed nature of the great verities.

Family ties, warm human affection, loyalty between man and man, these make the only foundation for home, the only bulwarks for the State. Only operating through them can peace return to a blood-stained and tormented world. Going softly about her duties in the home of her heart very humbly, grateful for mercy vouchsafed, Beatrice took her vows upon her that so far as in her lay, whether as wife, mother, or daughter of the State, she

would do her part unflinchingly and with a single heart for the betterment of the world.

Sorrow and disappointment and the heart-sickness of hope deferred had taught her at last that love is the only argument, and that life and happiness, and peace, all the precious things for which men have fought and died, do follow in its train.

“But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and for an helmet the hope of salvation.”

THE END

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